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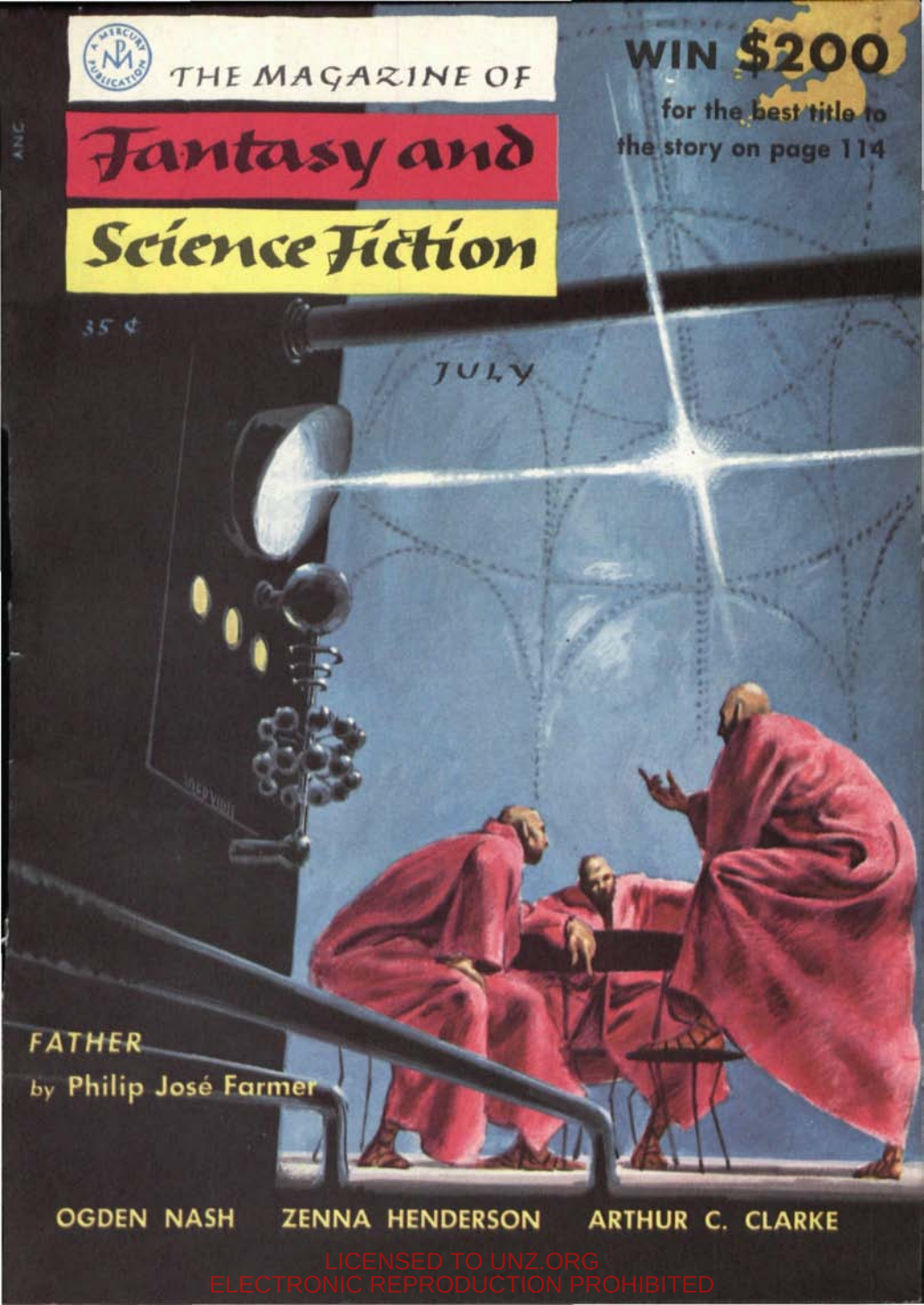

FATHER
by Philip José Farmer

OGDEN NASH ZENNA HENDERSON ARTHUR C. CLARKE

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 9, No. 1 JULY

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COVER PAINTING BY NICHOLAS SOLOVIOFF
(*from* Father, *by Philip José Farmer*)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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Remember Father John Carmody, the plump, bustling, humorous, shrewd interplanetary priest of Philip José Farmer's Attitudes *(F&SF, October, 1953)? Here he returns in a longer story to face a new and terrible problem, in which error on his part can mean death, physical and spiritual, to all the passengers and crew of a spaceship . . . and possibly to the Galaxy itself. For no other planet offers such subtle and tempting dangers as Abatos, nor does any other world acknowledge such a ruler as that awe-inspiring being known as Father, who may be a superman, a charlatan — or a god.*

Father

by PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

THE FIRST MATE OF THE GULL looked up from the navigation desk and pointed to the magnified figures cast upon the information screen by the spoolmike.

"If this is correct, sir, we're a hundred thousand kilometers from the second planet. There are ten planets in this system. Luckily, one is inhabitable. The second one."

He paused. Captain Tu looked curiously at him, for the man was very pale and had ironically accented the *luckily*.

"Sir, the second planet must be Abatos."

The captain's swarthy skin whitened to match the mate's. His mouth opened as if to form an oath, then clamped shut. At the same time his right hand made an abortive gesture towards his forehead, as if he had meant to touch it. His hand dropped.

"Very well, Mister Givens. We shall make an attempt to land. That is all we can do. Stand by for further orders."

He turned away so none could see his face.

"Abatos, Abatos," he murmured. He licked his dry lips and locked his hands behind his back.

Two short buzzes sounded. Midshipman Nkrumah passed his hand over an activating plate and said, "Bridge," to a plate that sprang into life and color on the wall. A steward's face appeared.

"Sir, please inform the captain that Bishop André and Father Carmody are waiting for him in cabin 7."

Captain Tu glanced at the bridge clock and tugged at the silver crucifix that hung from his right ear. Givens, Nkrumah, and Merkalov

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watched him intently, though they looked to one side when their eyes met his. He smiled grimly when he saw their expressions, unlocked his hands, and straightened his back. It was as if he knew his men were depending on him to preserve a calm that would radiate confidence in his ability to get them to safety. So, for a half minute, he posed monolithic in his sky-blue uniform that had not changed since the Twenty-First Century. Though it was well known that he felt a little ridiculous when he wore it planetside, when he was on his ship he walked as a man clad in armor. If coats and trousers were archaic and seen only at costume balls or in historical stereos or on officers of interstellar vessels, they did give a sense of apartness and of glamor and helped enforce discipline. The captain must have felt as if he needed every bit of confidence and respect he could muster. Thus, the conscious striking of the pose; here was the thoughtful and unnervous skipper who was so sure of himself that he could take time to attend to social demands.

"Tell the bishop I'll be in to see him at once," he ordered the midshipman.

He strode from the bridge, passed through several corridors, and entered the small lounge. There he paused in the doorway to look the passengers over. All except the two priests were there. None of them as yet was aware that the *Gull* was not merely going through one of the many transitions from normal space to perpendicular space. The two young lovers, Kate Lejeune and Pete Masters, were sitting in one corner on a sofa, holding hands and whispering softly and every now and then giving each other looks that ached with suppressed passion. At the other end of the room Mrs. Recka sat at a table playing double solitaire with the ship's doctor, Chandra Blake. She was a tall voluptuous blonde whose beauty was spoiled by an incipient double chin and dark halfmoons under eyes. The half-empty bottle of bourbon on the table told of the origin of her dissipated appearance; those who knew something of her personal history also knew that it was responsible for her being on the *Gull*. Separated from her husband on Wildenwooly, she was going home to her parents on the faraway world of Diveboard on the Galaxy's rim. She'd been given the choice of him or the bottle and had preferred the simpler and more transportable item. As she was remarking to the doctor when the captain entered, bourbon never criticized you or called you a drunken slut.

Chandra Blake, a short dark man with prominent cheekbones and large brown eyes, sat with a fixed smile and flickering gaze. He was very embarrassed at her loud conversation but was too polite to leave her.

Captain Tu touched his cap as he

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passed the four and smiled at their greetings, ignoring Mrs. Recka's invitation to sit at her table. Then he went down a long hall and pressed a button by the door of cabin 7.

It swung open and he strode in, a tall stiff gaunt man who looked as if he were made of some dark inflexible metal, stopped abruptly, and performed the seeming miracle of bending forward. He did so to kiss the bishop's extended hand, and with a lack of grace and a reluctance that took all the meaning out of the act. When he straightened up again, he almost gave the impression of sighing with relief. It was obvious that the captain liked to unbend to no man.

He opened his mouth as if to give them at once the unhappy news, but Father John Carmody pressed a drink into his hand.

"A toast, captain, to a quick trip to Ygdrasil," said Father John in a low gravelly voice. "We enjoy being aboard, but we've reason for haste in getting to our destination."

"I will drink to your health and His Excellency's," said Tu in a harsh clipped voice. "As for the quick trip, I'm afraid we'll need a little prayer. Maybe more than a little."

Father Carmody raised extraordinarily thick and tufted eyebrows but said nothing. This act of silence told much about his inner reactions; for he was a man who must forever be talking. He was short and fat, about 40, had heavy jowls, a thick shock of blue-black slightly wavy hair, bright blue and somewhat bulging eyes, a drooping left eyelid, a wide thick mouth, and a long sharp rocket-shaped nose. He quivered and shook and bounced with energy; he must always be on the move lest he explode; must be turning his hand to this and that, poking his nose here and there, must be laughing and chattering, must give the impression of vibrating inside with a great tuning fork.

Bishop André, standing beside him, was so tall and still and massive that he looked like an oak turned into a man, with Carmody the squirrel that raced around at his feet. His superb shoulders and arching chest and lean belly and calves bursting with muscle told of great strength rigidly controlled and kept at a prizefighter's peak. His features did justice to the physique; he had a large high-cheekboned head topped by a mane of lion-yellow hair. His eyes were a glowing golden-green, his nose straight and classical in profile though too narrow and pinched when seen from the front; his mouth full and red and deeply indented at the corners. The bishop, like Father John, was the darling of the ladies of the diocese of Wildenwooly, but for a different reason. Father John was fun to be around. He made them giggle and laugh and made even their most serious problems seem not insurmountable. But Bishop André made them weak-kneed when he looked into their

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eyes. He was the kind of priest who caused them regret that he was not available for marrying. The worst part of that was that His Excellency knew the effect he had and hated it. At times he had been downright curt and was always just a little standoffish. But no woman could long remain offended at him. Indeed, as was well known, the Bishop owed some of his meteoric rise to the efforts of the ladies behind the scenes. Not that he wasn't more than capable; it was just that he'd attained his rank faster than might have been expected.

Father John poured out a drink from a wine bottle, then filled two glasses with lemonade.

"I shall drink of the vine," he said. "You, Captain, will be forced to gag down this non-alcoholic beverage because you are on duty. His Excellency, however, refuses the cup that cheers, except as a sacrament, for reasons of principle. As for me, I take a little wine for my stomach's sake."

He patted his large round paunch. "Since my belly constitutes so much of me, anything I take for it I also take for my entire being. Thus, not only my entrails benefit, but my whole body glows with good health and joy and calls for some more tonic. Unfortunately, the bishop sets such an unendurably good example for me, I must restrain myself to this single cup. This, in spite of the fact that I am suffering from a perilous toothache and could dull the pain with an extra glass or two."

Smiling, he looked over the rim of his glass at Tu, who was grinning in spite of his tension, and at the bishop, whose set features and dignified bearing made him look like a lion deep in thought.

"Ah, forgive me, Your Excellency," said the padre. "I cannot help feeling that you are most immoderate in your temperance, but I should not have intimated as much. Actually, your asceticism is a model for all of us to admire, even if we haven't the strength of character to imitate it."

"You are forgiven, John," said the Bishop gravely. "But I'd prefer that you confine your raillery — for I cannot help thinking that that is what it is — to times when no one else is around. It is not good for you to speak in such a manner before others, who might think you hold your bishop in some measure of contempt."

"Now, God forgive me, I meant no such thing!" cried Carmody. "As a matter of fact, my levity is directed at myself, because I enjoy too much the too-good things of this life, and instead of putting on wisdom and holiness, add another inch to my waistline."

Captain Tu shifted uneasily, then suppressed his telltale movements. Obviously, this mention of God outside of church walls embarrassed him. Also, there just was no time to be chattering about trivial things.

"Let's drink to our good healths,"

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he said. He gulped his ade. Then, setting the glass on the table with an air of finality as if he would never get a chance to drink again, he said, "The news I have is bad. Our translator engine cut out about an hour ago and left us stranded in normal space. The chief says he can't find a thing wrong with it, yet it won't work. He has no idea of how to start it again. He's a thoroughly competent man, and when he admits defeat, the problem is unsolvable."

There was silence for a minute. Then Father John said, "How close are we to an inhabitable planet?"

"About a hundred thousand kilometers," replied Tu, tugging at the silver crucifix hanging from his ear. Abruptly realizing that he was betraying his anxiety, he let his hand fall to his side.

The padre shrugged his shoulders. "We're not in free fall, so there's nothing wrong with our interplanetary drive. Why can't we set down on this planet?"

"We're going to try to. But I'm not confident of our success. The planet is Abatos."

Carmody whistled and stroked the side of his long nose. André's bronzed face paled.

The little priest set down his glass and made a moue of concern.

"That is bad." He looked at the bishop. "May I tell the captain why we're so concerned about getting to Ygdrasil in a hurry?"

André nodded, his eyes downcast as if he were thinking of something that concerned the other two not at all.

"His Excellency," said Carmody, "left Wildenwooly for Ygdrasil because he thought he was suffering from hermit fever."

The captain flinched but did not step back from his position close to the bishop. Carmody smiled and said, "You needn't worry about catching it. He doesn't have it. Some of his symptoms matched those of hermit fever, but an examination failed to disclose any microbes. Not only that, His Excellency didn't develop a *typical* anti-social behavior. But the doctors decided he should go to Ygdrasil, where they have better facilities than those on Wildenwooly, which is still rather primitive, you know. Also, there's a Doctor Reudenbach there, a specialist in epileptoid diseases. It was thought best to see him, as His Excellency's condition was not improving."

Tu held out his palms in a gesture of helplessness.

"Believe me, Your Excellency, this news saddens me and makes me regret even more this accident. But there is nothing . . ."

André came out of his reverie. For the first time, he smiled, a slow, warm, and handsome smile. "What are my troubles compared to yours? You have the responsibility of this vessel and its expensive cargo. And, far more important, the welfare of twenty-five souls."

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He began pacing back and forth, speaking in his vibrant voice.

"We've all heard of Abatos. We know what it may mean if the translator doesn't begin working again. Or if we meet the same fate as those other ships that tried to land on it. We are about eight light years from Ygdrasil and six from Wildenwooly, which means we can't get to either place in normal drive. We either get the translator started or else land. Or remain in space until we die."

"And even if we are allowed to make planetfall," said Tu, "we may spend the rest of our lives on Abatos."

A moment later, he left the cabin. He was halted by Carmody, who had slipped out after him.

"When are you going to tell the other passengers?"

Tu looked at his watch.

"In two hours. By then we'll know whether or not Abatos will let us pass. I can't put off telling them any longer, because they'll know something's up. We should have been falling to Ygdrasil by now."

"The bishop is praying for us all now," said Carmody. "I shall concentrate my own request on an inspiration for the engineer. He's going to need it."

"There's nothing wrong with that translator," said Tu flatly, "except that it won't work."

Carmody looked shrewdly at him from under his thatched eyebrows and stroked the side of his nose.

"You think it's not an accident that the engine cut out?"

"I've been in many tough spots before," replied Tu, "and I've been scared. Yes, scared. I wouldn't tell any man except you — or maybe some other priest — but I have been frightened. Oh, I know it's a weakness, maybe even a sin . . ."

Here Carmody raised his eyebrows in amazement and perhaps a little awe of such an attitude.

". . . but I just couldn't seem to help it, though I swore that I'd never again feel that way, and I never allowed anyone to see it. My wife always said that if I'd allow myself now and then to show a little weakness, not much, just a little . . . Well, perhaps that may have been why she left me, I don't know, and it doesn't really matter any more, except . . ."

Suddenly realizing that he was wandering, the captain stopped, visibly braced himself, squared his shoulders, and said, "Anyway, Father, this set-up scares me worse than I've ever been scared. Why, I couldn't exactly tell you. But I've a feeling that Something caused that cut-out and for a purpose we won't like when we find out. All I have to base my reasoning on is what's happened to those other three ships. You know, everybody's read about them, how the *Hoyle* landed and was never heard of again, how the *Priam* investigated its disappearance and couldn't get any closer than fifty kilometers be-

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cause her normal space drive failed, and how the cruiser *Tokyo* tried to bull its way in with its drive dead and only escaped because it had enough velocity to take it past the fifty kilo limit. Even so, it almost burned up when it was going through the stratosphere."

"What I can't understand," said Carmody, "is how such an agent could affect us while we're in translation. Theoretically, we don't even exist in normal space then."

Tu tugged at the crucifix. "Yes, I know. But we're *here*. Whatever did this has a power unknown to man. Otherwise It wouldn't be able to pinpoint us in translation so close to Its home planet."

Carmody smiled cheerfully. "What's there to worry about? If it can haul us in like fish in a net, it must want us to land. So we don't have to fret about planetfall."

Suddenly, he grimaced with pain. "This perilous rotten molar of mine," he explained. "I was going to have it pulled and a bud put in when I got to Ygdrasil. And I'd sworn to quit eating so much of that chocolate of which I'm perilously overfond and which has already cost me the loss of several teeth. And now I must pay for my sins, for I was in such a hurry I forgot to bring along any painkiller, except for the wine. Or was that a Freudian slip?"

"Doctor Blake will have pain pills."

Carmody laughed. "So he does! Another convenient oversight! I'd hoped to confine myself to the natural medicine of the grape, and ignore the tasteless and enervating laboratory-born nostrums. But I have too many people looking out for my welfare. Well, such is the price of popularity."

He slapped Tu on the shoulder. "There's adventure awaiting us, Bill. Let's get going."

The captain did not seem to resent the familiarity. Evidently, he'd known Carmody for a long time.

"I wish I had your courage, Father."

"Courage!" snorted the priest. "I'm shaking in my hair shirt. But we must take what God sends us, and if we can like it, all the better."

Tu allowed himself to smile. "I like you because you can say something like that without sounding false or unctuous or — uh — priestly. I know you mean it."

"You're blessed well right I do," answered Carmody, then shifted from cheeriness to a more grave tone. "Seriously, though, Bill, I do hope we can get going soon. The bishop is in a bad way. He looks healthy, but he's liable at any moment to have an attack. If he does, I'll be pretty busy with him for a while. I can't tell you much more about him because he wouldn't want me to. Like you, he hates to confess to any weakness; he'll probably reprimand me when I go back to the cabin for having mentioned the matter to you. That's one reason why he has said nothing to Doc-

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tor Blake. When he has one of his . . . spells, he doesn't like anyone but me to take care of him. And he resents that little bit of dependency."

"It's pretty bad, then? Hard to believe. He's such a healthy-looking man; you wouldn't want to tangle with him in a scrap. He's a *good* man, too. Righteous as they make them. I remember one sermon he gave us at St. Pius' on Lazy Fair. Gave us hell and scared me into living a clean life for all of three weeks. The saints themselves must have thought they'd have to move over for me, and then . . ."

Seeing the look in Carmody's eyes, Tu stopped, glanced at his watch, and said, "Well, I've a few minutes to spare, and I've not been doing as well as I might, though I suppose we all could say that, eh, Father? Could we step into your cabin? There's no telling what might happen in the next few hours, and I'd like to be prepared."

"Certainly. Follow me, my son."

II

Two hours later, Captain Tu had told crew and passengers the truth over the bridge-viser. When his voice died and his grim gaunt face faded off the screen in the lounge, he left behind him silence and stricken looks. All except Carmody sat in their chairs as if the captain's voice had been an arrow pinning them to the cushions. Carmody stood in the center of the lounge, a soberly clad little figure in the midst of their bright clothes. He wore no rings on his ears, his legs were painted a decent black, his puffkilts were only moderately slashed, and his quilted dickie and suspenders were severe, innocent of golden spangles or jewels. Like all members of the Jairusite Order, he wore his Roman collar only when on planetside in memory of the founder and his peculiar but justified reason for doing so.

He shrewdly watched the passengers. Rocking back and forth on his heels, his forefinger tracing the length of his nose, he seemed to be interested in the announcement only from the viewpoint of how it was affecting them. There was no sign that he was concerned about himself.

Mrs. Recka was still sitting before her cards, her head bent to study them. But her hand went out more often to the bottle, and once she upset it with a noise that made Blake and the two young lovers jump. Without bothering to get up from her chair, she allowed the fifth to spill on the floor while she rung for the steward. Perhaps the significance of the captain's words had not penetrated the haze in her brain. Or perhaps she just did not care.

Pete Masters and Kate Lejeune had not moved or spoken a word. They huddled closer, if that were possible, and squeezed hands even more tightly — pale-faced, their

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heads nodded like two white balloons shaken by an internal wind, Kate's red painted mouth vivid against her bloodless skin, hanging open like a gash in the sphere and by some miracle keeping the air inside her so her head did not collapse.

Carmody looked at them with pity, for he knew their story far better than they realized. Kate was the daughter of a rich "pelterpiper" on Wildenwooly. Pete was the son of a penniless "tinwoodman," one of those armored lumberjacks who venture deep into the planet's peculiarly dangerous forests in search of wishing-wood trees. After his father had been dragged into an underwater cavern by a snoligoster, Pete had gone to work for Old Man Lejeune. That he had courage was quickly proved, for it took guts to pipe the luxuriously furred but savage-tempered agropelters out of their hollow trees and conduct them into the hands of the skinners. That he was also foolhardy was almost as swiftly demonstrated, for he had fallen as passionately in love with Kate as she had with him.

When he had summoned up enough bravery to ask her father for her hand — Old Man Lejeune was as vicious and quickly angered as an agropelter itself and not to be charmed by any blowing on a pipe — he had been thrown out bodily with several bruises and contusions, a slight brain concussion, and a promise that if he got within speaking distance of her again he would lose both life and limb. Then had followed the old and inevitable story. After getting out of the hospital, Pete had sent Kate messages through her widowed aunt. The aunt disliked her brother and was moreover such an intense devotee of the stereo romance-serials that she would have done almost anything to smooth the path of true love.

Thus it was that a copter had suddenly dropped onto the port outside Breakneck just before the *Gull* was to take off. After identifying themselves and purchasing tickets — which was all they had to do to get passage, for there were no visas or passports for human beings who wanted transportation between planets of the Commonwealth — they had entered cabin 9, next to the bishop's, and there stayed until just before the translator had broken down.

Kate's aunt had been too proud of her part as Cupid to keep her mouth shut. She'd told a half a dozen friends in Breakneck, after getting their solemn promises not to tell anyone. Result: Father Carmody had all the facts and some of the lies about the Masters-Lejeune affair. When the couple had slipped aboard, he'd known at once what had happened and indeed was waiting for the outraged father to follow them with a band of tough skinners to take care of Pete. But the ship had flashed away, and now there was little chance they'd be met at

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Ygdrasil port with an order for the couple's detention. They'd be lucky if they ever arrived there.

Carmody walked to a spot before them and halted. "Don't be frightened, kids," he said. "The captain's private opinion is that we won't have any trouble landing on Abatos."

Pete Masters was a redhaired hawk-nosed youth with hollow cheeks and a too large chin. His frame was large but he'd not yet filled out with a man's muscles nor gotten over the slouch of the adolescent who grows too fast. He covered the delicate long-fingered hand of Kate with his big bony hand and said, glaring up at the priest, "And I suppose he'll turn us over to the authorities as soon as we land?"

Carmody blinked at the brassiness of Pete's voice and leaned slightly forward as if he were walking against the wind of it.

"Hardly," he said softly. "If there's an authority on Abatos, we haven't met him yet. But we may, we may."

He paused and looked at Kate. She was pretty and petite. Her long wheaten hair was caught up in back with a silver circlet; her large violet eyes turned up to meet his with a mixture of guilelessness and pleading.

"Actually," said the padre, "your father can't do a thing — legally — to stop you two unless you commit a crime. Let me see, you're nineteen, aren't you, Pete? And you, Kate, are only seventeen, right? If I remember the clauses in the Free Will Act, your being under age will not hamper your moving away from your father's house without his permission. You're of mobile age. On the other hand, according to law, you're not of nubile age. Biology, I know, contradicts that, but we also live in a social world, one of manmade laws. You may not get married without your father's consent. If you try to do so, he may legally restrain you. And will, no doubt."

"He can't do a thing," said Pete, fiercely. "We're not going to get married until Kate is of age."

He glared from under straw-colored eyebrows. Kate's paleness disappeared under a flood of red, and she looked down at her slim legs, painted canary yellow with scarlet-tipped toenails. Her free hand plucked at her Kelly-green puffkilts.

Carmody's smile remained.

"Forgive a nosy priest who is interested because he doesn't want to see you hurt. Or to have you hurt anybody. But I know your father, Kate. I know he's quite capable of carrying out his threat against Pete. Would you want to see him kidnaped, brutally beaten up, perhaps killed?"

She raised her large eyes to him, her cheeks still flaming. She was very beautiful, very young, very intense.

"Daddy wouldn't dare!" she said

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in a low but passionate voice. "He knows that if anything happens to Pete, I'll kill myself. I said so in the note I left him, and he knows I'm just as stubborn as he. Daddy won't hurt Pete because he loves me too much."

"Just don't bother talking to him, honey," said Pete. "I'll handle this. Carmody, we don't want any interference, well meant or not. We just want to be left alone."

Father John sighed. "To be left alone is little enough to desire. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, it's one of the rarest things in this universe, almost as rare as peace of mind or genuine love for mankind."

"Spare me your clichés," said Pete. "Save them for church."

"Ah, yes, I did see you once at St. Mary's, didn't I?" replied Father John, stroking the side of his nose. "Two years ago during that outbreak of hermit fever. Hmm."

Kate put her hand on the young man's wrist. "Please, darling. He means well, and what he says is true, anyway."

"Thank you, Kate."

Carmody hesitated, then, looking thoughtful and sad, he reached into the puffkilt's pocket and pulled out a slip of yellow paper. He held it out to Kate, who took it with a trembling hand.

"This was given to the steward just before our ship took off," he said. "It was too late then for anything to be done; unless it's a matter of supreme importance, the ship's schedule is adhered to."

Kate read the message and paled again. Pete, reading over her shoulder, became red, and his nostrils flared. Tearing the paper from her, he jumped up.

"If Old Man Lejeune thinks he can jail me by accusing me of stealing his money, he's crazy!" he snarled. "He can't prove it because I didn't do it! I'm innocent, and I'll prove it by volunteering for chalarocheil! Or any truth drug they want to give me! That'll show him up for the liar he is!"

Father John's eyes widened. "Meanwhile, you two will be held, and Kate's father will take steps to get her back or at least remove her to the other end of the Galaxy. Now, I'd like to suggest . . ."

"Never mind your needlenosing suggestions," barked Pete.

He crumpled the paper and dropped it on the floor. "Come on, Kate, let's go to our cabin."

Submissively, she rose, though she shot a look at Pete as if she'd like to express her opinion. He ignored it.

"Do you know," he continued, "I'm glad we're being forced to land on Abatos. From what I've read, the *Tokyo* determined that it's a habitable planet, perhaps another Eden. So Kate and I ought to be able to live fairly easy on it. I've got my Powerkit in my cabin; with it we can build a cabin and till the soil and hunt and fish and raise our children as we wish. And there'll be

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no interference from anyone — no one at all."

Father John cocked his head to one side and let his left eyelid droop. "Adam and Eve, heh? Won't you two become rather lonely? Besides, how do you know what dangers Abatos holds?"

"Pete and I need nobody else," replied Kate quietly. "And we're not afraid of anything at all."

"Except your father."

But the two were walking away hand in hand; they might not have heard him.

He leaned over to pick up the paper, grunting as he did so. Straightening up with a sigh, he smoothed it out and read it.

Doctor Blake rose from the table and approached him. He smiled with a mixture of affability and reproach.

"Aren't you being a little bit too officious?"

Carmody smiled. "You've known me for a long time, Chandra. You know that this long sharp nose of mine is an excellent sign of my character, and that I would not put my hand in the flame to deny that I am a needlenosing busybody. However, my excuse is that I am a priest and that that is a professional attribute. No escaping it. Moreover, I happen to be interested in those kids; I want them to get out of this mess without being hurt."

"You're likely to get the shape of your nose changed. That Pete looks wild enough to swing on you."

Father John rubbed the end of his nose. "Won't be the first time it's been busted. But I doubt if Pete'd hit me. One good thing about popping off if you're a priest. Even the roughest hesitate about hitting you. Almost like striking a woman. Or God's representative. Or both. We cowards sometimes take advantage of that."

Blake snorted. "Coward?" Then, "Kate's not even of your religion, Father, and Pete might as well not be."

Carmody shrugged and spread his palms out as if to show that his hands were for anybody who needed them. A few minutes later, he was pressing the buzzer by the bishop's door. When he heard no answering voice, he turned as if to go, then stopped, frowning. Abruptly, as if obeying an inner warning, he pushed in on the door. Unlocked, it swung open. He gasped and ran into the room.

The bishop was lying face up on the middle of the floor, his arms and legs extended crucifix-wise, his back arched to form a bow, his eyes open and fixed in a stare at a point on the ceiling. His face was flushed and glistening with sweat; his breath hissed; bubbles of foam escaped from his lax mouth. Yet there was nothing of the classic seizure about him, for the upper part of his body seemed to be immobile, almost as if it were formed of wax just on the verge of melting from some internal heat. The lower part, on the con-

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trary, was in violent movement. His legs thrashed, and his pelvis stabbed upwards. He looked as if a sword had cut an invisible path through the region of his abdomen and severed the nerves and muscles that connected the two halves. The trunk had cast off the hips and legs and said, "What you do is no concern of mine."

Carmody closed the door and hastened to do that which needed doing for the bishop.

III

The *Gull* chose to settle upon a spot in the center of the only continent of Abatos, a globe-encircling mass large as Africa and Asia put together, all of it in the northern hemisphere.

"Best landing I ever made," said Tu to his first mate. "Almost as if I were a machine, I set her down so easy." Aside, he muttered, "Perhaps I've saved the best for the last."

Carmody did not come from the bishop's cabin until twenty-four hours later. After telling the doctor and the captain that André was resting quietly and did not wish to be disturbed, Carmody asked what they'd found out so far. Obviously, he'd been eaten up with curiosity while locked in the cabin, for he had a hundred questions ready and could not fire them out fast enough.

They could tell him little, though their explorations had covered much territory. The climate seemed to be about what you'd find in midwest America in May. The vegetation and animal life paralleled those of Earth, but of course there were many unfamiliar species.

"Here's something strange," said Doctor Blake. He picked up several thin disks, cross-sections of trees, and handed them to the priest. "Pete Masters cut these with his Powerkit. Apparently, he's been looking for the best kind of wood with which to build a cabin — or maybe I should say a mansion; he has some rather grandiose ideas about what he's going to do here. Notice the grain and the distance between the rings. Perfect grain. And the rings are separated by exactly the same length. Also, no knots or worm holes of any kind.

"Pete pointed out these interesting facts, so we cut down about forty trees of different types with the ship's Survival Kit saw. And all specimens showed the same perfection. Not only that, but the number of rings, plus the Mead method of photostatic dating, proved that every tree was exactly the same age. All had been planted ten thousand years ago!"

"The only comment I could make would be an understatement," said Carmody. "Hmmm. The even spacing of the growth rings would indicate that the seasons, if any, follow a regular pattern, that there have been no irregular stretches of wetness and dryness but a static allotment of rain and sunshine. But these woods are wild and untended.

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How account for the lack of damage from parasites? Perhaps there are none."

"Don't know. Not only that, the fruit of these trees is very large and tasty and abundant — all looking as if they'd come from stock carefully bred and protected. Yet we've seen no signs of intelligent life."

Blake's black eyes sparkled, and his hands seesawed with excitement.

"We took the liberty of shooting several animals so we could examine them. I did a fast dissection on a small zebra-like creature, a wolf with a long copper-colored snout, a yellow red-crested corvine, and a kangarooish non-marsupial. Even my hasty study turned up several astonishing facts, though one of them could have been determined by any layman."

He paused, then burst out, "All were females! And the dating of their bones indicated that they, like the trees, were ten thousand years old!"

Father John's tufted eyebrows could rise no higher; they looked like untidy wings flapping heavily with a freight of amazement.

"Yes, we've detected no males at all among any of the millions of beasts that we've seen. Not a one. All, all females!"

He took Carmody's elbow and escorted him towards the woods.

"Ten thousand years old the skeletons were. But that wasn't all that was marvelous about them. Their bones were completely innocent of evolutionary vestiges, were perfectly functional. Carmody, you're an amateur paleontologist, you should know how unique that is. On every planet where we've studied fossil and contemporary skeletons, we've found that they display tag-ends of bones that have degenerated in structure because of loss of function. Consider the toes of a dog, the hooves of a horse. The dog, you might say, walks on his fingers and has lost his big toe and reduced his thumb to a small size. The horse's splint bones were once two toes, the hoof representing the main toe that hardened and on which the fossil horse put his main weight. But this zebra had no splint bones, and the wolf showed no vestiges of toes that had lost their function. The same with the other creatures I studied. Functionally perfect."

"But, but," said Father John, "you know that evolution on other planets doesn't follow exactly the same pattern laid down on Earth. Moreover, the similarity between a terrestrial and a non-terrestrial type may be misleading. As a matter of fact, likenesses between Earth types may be deceiving. Look how the isolated Australian marsupials developed parallels to placentals. Though not at all related to the higher mammals of the other continents, they evolved dog-like, mouse-like, mole-like, and bear-like creatures."

"I'm quite aware of that," re-

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plied Blake, a little stiffly. "I'm no ignoramus, you know. There are other factors determining my opinion, but you talk so much you've given me no chance to tell you."

Carmody had to laugh. "I? Talk? I've hardly gotten in a word. Never mind. I apologize for my gabbiness. What else is there?"

"Well, I had some of the crewmen do some looking around. They brought in hundreds of specimens of insects, and of course I'd no time for anything except a hasty glance. But there were none with any correspondence to larval forms as we know them on Earth. All adult forms. When I thought of that, I realized something else we'd all seen but hadn't been impressed by, mostly, I suppose, because the deductions were too overwhelming or because we just weren't looking for such a thing. We saw no young among the animals."

"Puzzling, if not frightening," said Carmody. "You may release my elbow, if you wish. I'll go with you willingly. Which reminds me, where are you taking me?"

"Here!"

Blake stopped before a redwoodish tree towering perhaps two hundred feet. He indicated a very large hole in the trunk, about two feet from the ground. "This cavity was not the result of disease or damage by some animal. It obviously is part of the tree's structure."

He directed the beam of a flashlight into the dark interior. Carmody stuck his head into the hole and after a moment withdrew it, looking thoughtful.

"There must be about ten tons of that jelly-like substance inside," he said. "And there are bones embedded deep within it."

"Wherever you go, you find these jelly trees, as we now call them," said Blake. "About half of them hold animal skeletons."

"What are they? A sort of Venusian fly-trap?" asked the priest, involuntarily taking a backward step. "No, they couldn't be that, or you'd not have allowed me to stick my head in. Or does it, like many men, find theological subjects distasteful?"

Blake laughed, then sobered quickly.

"I've no idea *why* these bones are there nor what purpose the jelly serves," he said. "But I can tell you *how* they got there. You see, while we were flying around, mapping and observing, we witnessed several killings by the local carnivora. There are two types we were glad we didn't run into on the ground, though we've means to repel them if we see them soon enough. One's a cat about the size of a Bengal tiger, leopard-like except for big round ears and tufts of gray fur on the backs of its legs. The other's a ten-foot-high black-furred mammal built like a tyrannosaurus with a bear's head. Both prey on the zebras and the numerous deer and antelope. You'd think that their

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fleet-footed prey would keep the killers swift and trim, but they don't. The big cats and the struthiursines are the fattest and laziest meat-eaters you ever saw. When they attack, they don't sneak up through the grass and then make a swift but short run. They walk boldly into view, roar a few times, wait until the majority of the herd have dashed off, then select one from the several submissive animals that have refused to flee, and kill it. Those that have been spared then drift off. They're not frightened by the sight of the killer devouring one of their sisters. No, they just appear uneasy.

"As if that weren't extraordinary enough, the sequel positively astounds you. After the big killer has gorged himself and leaves, the small carrion-eaters then descend, yellowish crows and brown-and-white foxes. The bones are well cleaned. But they aren't left to bleach in the sun. Along comes a black ape with a long lugubrious face — the undertaker ape, we call him — and he picks the bones up and deposits them in the jelly inside the nearest jelly tree. Now, what do you think of that?"

"I think that, though it's a warm day, I have a sudden chill. I . . . oh, there's His Excellency. Excuse me."

The priest hurried across the daisy-starred meadow, a long black case in his hand. The bishop did not wait for him but stepped from the shadow of the ship into the light. Though the yellow sun had risen only an hour ago above the purplish mountains to the east, it was very bright. When it struck the bishop's figure, it seemed to burst into flame around him and magnify him, almost as if its touch were that of a golden god imparting some of his own magnificence to him. The illusion was made all the stronger by the fact that André showed no signs of his recent illness. His face glowed, and he strode swiftly towards the crowd at the forest's edge, his shoulders squared and his deep chest rising and falling as if he were trying to crowd all the planet's air into his lungs.

Carmody, who met him halfway, said, "You may well breathe this superb air, Your Excellency. It has a tang and freshness that is quite virginal. Air that has never been breathed by man before."

André looked about him with the slowness and sure majesty of a lion staking out a new hunting territory. Carmody smiled slightly. Though the bishop made a noble figure of a man, he gave at that moment just the hint of a poseur, so subtle that only one with Carmody's vast experience could have detected it. André, catching the fleeting indentations at the corners of the little priest's lips, frowned and raised his hands in protest.

"I know what you are thinking."

Carmody bent his neck to gaze at the bright green grass at their feet.

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Whether he did so to acknowledge that the reprimand was just or to hide another emotion, he managed to veil his eyes. Then, as if realizing it was not good to conceal his thoughts, he raised his head to look his bishop in the eyes. His gesture was similar to André's and had dignity but none of the other man's beauty, for Carmody could never look beautiful, except with the more subtle beauty that springs from honesty.

"I hope you can forgive me, Your Excellency. But old habits die hard. Mockery was so long a part of me before I was converted — indeed, was a necessity if one was to survive on the planet where I lived, which was Dante's Joy, you know — that it dug deep into my nervous system. I believe that I am making a sincere effort to overcome the habit; but, being human, I am sometimes lax."

"We must strive to be more than human," replied André, making a gesture with his hand which the priest, who knew him well, interpreted as a sign to drop the subject. It was not peremptory, for he was almost always courteous and patient. His time was not his; the lowliest were his masters. Had he seen that Carmody was persistent in dwelling on that line of thought, he would have allowed it. The priest, however, accepted his superior's decision.

He held out a slender black case six feet long.

"I thought that perhaps Your Excellency would like to try the fishing here. It may be true that Wildenwooly has a Galaxy-wide reputation for the best fishing anywhere, but there's something about the very looks of Abatos that tells me we'll find fish here to put a glow in our hearts — not to mention a whale of an appetite in our mouths. Would you care to try a few casts? It might benefit Your Excellency?"

André's smile was slow and gentle, ending in a huge grin of delight. "I'd like that very much, John. You could have suggested nothing better."

He turned to Tu. "Captain?"

"I think it'll be safe. We've sent out survey copters. They reported some large carnivores but none close. However, some of the herbivores may be dangerous. Remember, even a domestic bull may be a killer. The copter crews did try to get some of the larger beasts to charge and failed. The animals either ignored them or ambled away. Yes, you may go fishing, though I wish the lake weren't so far off. What about a copter dropping you off there and picking you up later?"

André said, "No, thank you. We can't get the feel of this planet by flying over it. We'll walk."

The first mate held out two pistols of some sort.

"Here you are, Reverends. Something new. Sonos. Shoots a subsonic beam that panics man or beast, makes 'em want to get to hell and

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away as fast as they can, if you'll pardon the expression."

"Of course. But we can't accept them. Our order is never permitted to carry arms, for any reason."

"I wish you'd break the rule this time," said Tu. "Rules aren't made to be broken; no captain would subscribe to that proverb. But there are times when you have to consider their context."

"Absolutely not," replied the bishop, looking keenly at Carmody, who'd stretched out his hand as if to take a sono.

At the glance, the priest dropped his hand. "I merely wished to examine the weapon," said Carmody. "But I must admit I've never thought much of that rule. It's true that Jairus had his peculiar power over beasts of prey. However, that fact didn't necessarily endow his disciples with a similar gift. Think of what happened on Jimdandy because St. Victor refused a gun. Had he used one, he'd have saved a thousand lives."

The bishop closed his eyes and murmured so that only Carmody could hear, "*Even though I walk in the dark valley . . .*"

Carmody murmured back, "But the dark is sometimes cold, and the hairs on the back of the neck rise with fear, though I become hot with shame."

"Hmm. Speaking of shame, John, you always manage, somehow, while deprecating yourself, to leave me discomfited and belittled. It's a talent which, perhaps, should be possessed by the man who is most often with me, for it cuts down my inclination to grow proud. On the other hand . . ."

Carmody waved the long case in his hand. "On the other hand, the fish may not wait for us."

André nodded and began walking towards the woods. Tu said something to a crewman, who ran after the two priests and gave the little one a shipfinder, a compass that would always point in the *Gull's* direction. Carmody flashed a grin of thanks and, shoulders set jauntily, bounced after the swiftly striding bishop, the case whipping behind him like a saucy antenna. He whistled an old old tune — "My Buddy." Though seemingly carefree, his eyes looked everywhere. He did not fail to see Pete Masters and Kate Lejeune slipping hand in hand into the woods in another direction. He stopped in time to keep from bumping into the bishop, who had turned and was frowning back towards the ship. At first Carmody thought he, too, had noticed the young couple, then saw he was gazing at Mrs. Recka and First Mate Givens. They were standing to one side and talking very intensely. Then they began walking slowly across the meadow towards the towering hemisphere of the *Gull*. André stood motionless until the couple went into the ship and, a moment later, came out. This time Mrs. Recka had her pocket-

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book, a rather large one whose size was not enough to conceal the outlines of a bottle within. Still talking, the two went around the curve of the vessel and presently came into sight of the priests again, though they could not be seen by Tu or the crew members.

Carmody murmured, "Must be something in the air of this planet . . ."

"What do you mean by that?" said the bishop, his features set very grim, his green eyes narrowed but blazing.

"If this is another Eden, where the lion lies down with the lamb, it is also a place where a man and woman . . ."

"If Abatos is fresh and clean and innocent," growled the bishop, "it will not remain so very long. Not while we have people like those, who would foul any nest."

"Well, you and I will have to content ourselves with fishing."

"Carmody, don't grin when you say that! You sound almost as if you were blessing them instead of condemning!"

The little priest lost his half-smile. "Hardly. I was neither condemning nor blessing. Nor judging them beforehand, for I don't actually know what they have in mind. But it is true that I have too wide a streak of the earth earthy, a dabble of Rabelais, perhaps. It's not that I commend. It's just that I understand too well, and . . ."

Without replying, the bishop turned away violently and resumed his longlegged pace. Carmody, somewhat subdued, followed at his heels, though there was often room enough for the two to walk side by side. Sensitive to André's moods, he knew that it was best to keep out of his sight for a while. Meanwhile, he'd interest himself in his surroundings.

The copter survey crews had reported that between the mountains to the east and the ocean to the west the country was much alike: a rolling, sometimes hilly, land with large prairies interspersed with forests. The latter seemed more like a park than untamed woods. The grass was a foot-high succulent kind kept cropped by the herbivores; many of the trees had their counterparts among the temperate latitudes of Earth; only here and there were thick tangled stretches that might properly be called wild. The lake towards which the two were headed lay in the center of just such a "jungle." The widely spaced oaks, pines, cypresses, beeches, sycamores, and cedars here gave way to an island of the jelly-containing redwoods. Actually, they did not grow close together but gave that impression because of the many vines and lianas that connected them and the tiny parasitic trees, like evergreens, that grew horizontally out of cracks in their trunks.

It was darker under these great vegetation-burdened limbs, though here and there shafts of sunlight slanted, seeming like solid and lean-

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ing trunks of gold themselves. The forest was alive with the color and calls of bright birds and the dark bodies and chitterings of arboreal animals. Some of these looked like monkeys; when they leapt through the branches and came quite close, the resemblance was even more amazing. But they were evidently not sprung from a protosimian base; they must have been descended from a cat that had decided to grow fingers instead of claws and to assume a semi-upright posture. Dark brown on the back, they had gray-furred bellies and chests and long prehensile tails tufted at the end with auburn. Their faces had lost the pointed beastish look and become flat as an ape's. Three long thick feline whiskers bristled from each side of their thin lips. Their teeth were sharp and long, but they picked and ate a large pear-shaped berry that grew on the vines. Their slitted pupils expanded in the shade and contracted in the sunlit spaces. They chattered among themselves and behaved in general like monkeys, except that they seemed to be cleaner.

"Perhaps they've cousins who evolved into humanoid beings," said Carmody aloud, partly because he'd the habit of talking to himself, partly to see if the bishop were out of his mood.

"Heh?" said André, stopping and also looking at the creatures, who returned his gaze just as curiously. "Oh, yes, Sokoloff's Theory of the Necessary Chance. Every branch of the animal kingdom as we know it on Earth seems to have had its opportunity to develop into a sentient being some place in the Galaxy. The vulpoids of Kubeia, the avians of Albireo IV, the cetaceoids of Oceanos, the molluscs of Baudelaire, the Houyhnhnms of Somewhere Else, the so-called lying bugs of Münchausen, the . . . well, I could go on and on. But on almost every Earth-type planet we find this or that line of life seized the evolutionary chance given by God and developed intelligence. All, with some exceptions, going through an arboreal simian stage and then flowering into an upright creature resembling man."

"And all thinking of themselves as being God's image, even the porpoise-men of Oceanos and the land-oysters of Baudelaire," added Carmody. "Well, enough of philosophy. At least, fish are fish, on any planet."

They had come out of the forest onto the lake shore. It was a body of water about a mile wide and two long, fed by a clear brook to the north. The grass grew to the very edge, where little frogs leaped into the water at their approach. Carmody uncased their two rods but disengaged the little jet mechanisms that would have propelled their bait-tipped lines far out over the lake.

"Really not sporting," he said. "We ought to give these foreign piscines a chance, eh?"

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"Right," replied the bishop, smiling. "If I can't do anything with my own right arm, I'll go home with an empty basket."

"I forgot to bring along a basket, but we can use some of those broad leaves on the vines to wrap our catch in."

An hour later they were forced to stop because of the pile of finny life behind them, and these were only the biggest ones. The rest had been thrown back. André had hooked the largest, a magnificent trout of about 30 pounds, a fighter who took twenty minutes to land. After that, sweating and breathing hard but shining-eyed, he said, "I'm hot. What do you say to a swim, John?"

Carmody smiled at the use of his familiar name again and shouted, "Last one in is a Sirian!"

In a minute two naked bodies plunged into the cold clear waters at exactly the same time. When they came up, Carmody sputtered, "Guess we're both Sirians, but you win, for I'm the ugliest. Or does that mean that I win?"

André laughed for sheer joy, then sped across the lake in a fast crawl. The other did not even try to follow him but floated on his back, eyes closed. Once he raised his head to determine if the bishop was getting along but quit when he saw that he was in no trouble. André had reached the other shore and was returning at a slower but easy pace. When he did come back and had rested for a while on the beach, he said, "John would you mind climbing out and timing me in a dive? I'd like to see if I'm still in good form. It's about seven feet here, not too deep."

Carmody climbed onto the grassy shore, where he set his watch and gave the signal. André plunged under. When he emerged he swam back at once. "How'd I do?" he called as he waded out of the water, his magnificent body shining wet and golden brown in the late afternoon sun.

"Four minutes, three seconds," said Carmody. "About forty seconds off your record. But still better, I'll bet, than any other man in the Galaxy. You're the champ yet, Your Excellency."

André nodded, smiling slightly. "Twenty years ago I set the record. I believe that if I went again into rigorous training, I could equal it again or even beat it. I've learned much since then about control of my body and mind. Even then I was not entirely at ease in the pressure and gloom of the underwater. I loved it, but my love was tinged just a little with terror. An attitude that is almost, you might say, one's attitude towards God. Perhaps too much so, as one of my parishioners was kind enough to point out to me. I think he meant that I was paying too much attention to what should have been only a diversion for my idle moments.

"He was correct, of course, though I rather resented his remarks at the time. He couldn't have known that

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it was an irresistible challenge to me to float beneath the bright surface, all alone, feel myself buoyed as if in the arms of a great mother, yet also feel her arms squeezing just a little too tight. I had to fight down the need to shoot to the surface and suck in lifegiving air, yet I was proud because I could battle that panic, could defeat it. I felt always as if I was in danger but because of that very danger was on the verge of some vital discovery about myself — what, I never found out. But I always thought that if I stayed down long enough, could keep out the blackness and the threat of loss of consciousness, I would find the secret.

"Strange thought, wasn't it? It lead me to study the neo-Yoga disciplines which were supposed to enable one to go into suspended animation, death-in-life. There was a man on Gandhi who could stay buried alive for three weeks, but I could never determine if he was faking or not. He was some help to me, however. He taught me that if I would, as he put it, go dead here, first of all," and André touched his left breast, "then here," and he touched his loins, "the rest would follow. I could become as an embryo floating in the amniotic sac, living but requiring no breath, no oxygen except that which soaked through the cells, as he put it. An absurd theory, scientifically speaking, yet it worked to some extent. Would you believe it, I now have to force myself to rise because it seems so safe and nice and warm under there, even when the water is very cold, as in this lake?"

While he talked, he'd been wiping off the water from his skin with his quilted dickie, his back turned to Carmody. The priest knew his bishop was embarrassed to expose himself. He himself, though he knew his body looked ugly and grotesque besides the other's perfect physique, was not at all ill-at-ease. In common with most of the people of his time, he'd been raised in a world where nudity on the beach and in the private home was socially accepted, almost demanded. André, born in the Church, had had a very strict upbringing by devout parents who had insisted that he follow the millennia-old pattern even in the midst of a world that mocked.

It was of that he spoke now, as if he'd guessed what Carmody was thinking.

"I disobeyed my father but once," he said. "That was when I was ten. We lived in a neighborhood composed mainly of agnostics or members of the Temple of Universal Light. But I had some very good pals among the local gang of boys and tomboys, and just once they talked me into going swimming in the river, skin-style. Of course my father caught me; he seemed to have an instinct for detecting when sin was threatening any of his family. He gave me the beating of my life — may his soul rest in peace," he added without conscious irony.

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" 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' was ever his favorite maxim, yet he had to whip me just that one time in my life. Or rather, I should say twice, because I tore loose from him while he was strapping me in front of the gang, plunged into the river, and dived deep, where I stayed a long time in an effort to frighten my father into thinking I'd drowned myself. Eventually, of course, I had to come up. My father resumed the punishment. He was no more severe the second time, though. He couldn't have been without killing me. As a matter of fact, he almost did. If it weren't for modern science's ability to do away with scars, I'd still bear them on my back and legs. As it is, they're still here," and he pointed to indicate his heart.

He finished drying himself and picked up his puffkilt. "Well, that was thirty-five years ago and thousands of lightyears away, and I dare say the beating did me a tremendous amount of good."

He looked at the clear sky and at the woods, arched his deep chest in a great breath, and said, "This is a wonderful and unspoiled planet, a testimony to God's love for the beauty of His creatures and His generosity in scattering them across the universe, almost as if He had had to do so! Here I feel as if God *is* in His heaven and all's right with the world. The symmetry and fruitfulness of those trees, the clean air and waters, the manifold songs of those birds and their bright colors . . ."

He stopped, for he suddenly realized what Carmody had just previously noticed. There was none of the noisy but melodious twitterings and chirpings and warblings nor the chattering of the monkeys. All was hush. Like a thick blanket of moss, a silence hung over the forest.

"Something's scared those animals," whispered Carmody. He shivered, though the westering sun was yet hot, and he looked around. Near them, on a long branch that extended over the lake's edge, sat a row of catmonkeys that had appeared as if from nowhere. They were gray-furred except for a broad white mark on their chests, roughly in the form of a cross. Their head hair grew thick and forward and fell over their foreheads like a monk's cowl. Their hands were placed over their eyes in a monkey-see-no-evil attitude. But their eyes shone bright between their fingers, and Carmody, despite his sense of uneasiness, felt a prickling of laughter and murmured, "No fair peeking."

A deep cough sounded in the forest; the monk-monks, as he'd tagged them, cowered and crowded even closer together.

"What could that be?" said the bishop.

"Must be a big beast. I've heard lions cough; they sounded just like that."

Abruptly, the bishop reached out a large square hand and closed

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Carmody's little pudgy hand in it.

Alarmed at the look on André's face, Carmody said, "Is another seizure coming on?"

The bishop shook his head. His eyes were glazed. "No. Funny, I felt for a moment almost as I did when my father caught me."

He released the other's hand and took a deep breath. "I'll be all right."

He lifted his kilt to step into it. Carmody gasped. André jerked his head upright and gave a little cry. Something white was looming in the shadow of the trees, moving slowly but surely, the focus and cause of the silence that spread everywhere. Then it grew darker as it stepped into the sunshine and stopped for a moment, not to adjust its eyes to the dazzle but to allow the beholders to adjust their eyes to him. He was eight feet tall and looked much like a human being and moved with such dignity and such beauty that the earth seemed to give way respectfully at each footstep. He was long-bearded and naked and massively male, and the eyes were like those of a granite statue of a god that had become flesh, too terrible to look straight into.

He spoke. They knew then the origin of that cough that had come from the depth of lungs deep as an oracle's well. His voice was a lion's roar; it made the two pygmies clasp each other's hands again and unloosed their muscles so that they thought they'd come apart. Yet they did not think of how amazing it was that he should speak in their tongue.

"Hello, my sons!" he thundered.

They bowed their heads.

"Father."

IV

An hour before sunset, André and Carmody ran out of the woods. They were in a hurry because of the tremendous uproar that had aroused the forest for miles around. Men were yelling, and a woman was screaming, and something was growling loudly. They arrived just in time to see the end. Two enormous beasts, bipedal heavily tailed creatures with bearish heads, were racing after Kate Lejeune and Pete Masters. Kate and Pete were running hand in hand, he pulling her so fast that she seemed to fly through the air with every step. In his other hand he carried his powersaw. Neither had a sono-gun with which to defend themselves, although Captain Tu had ordered that no one be without the weapon. A moment later it was seen that the gun would have made no difference, for several crewmen who had been standing by the ship had turned their sonos against the beasts. Undeterred by the panicking effects of the beams, the monsters sprang after the couple and caught them halfway across the meadow.

Though unarmed, André and Carmody ran at the things, their fists clenched. Pete turned in his

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captor's grasp and struck it across the muzzle with the sharp edge of his saw. Kate screamed loudly, then fainted. Suddenly, the two were lying in the grass, for the animals had dropped them and were walking almost leisurely towards the woods. That neither the sonos nor the priests had scared them off was evident. They brushed by the latter without noticing them, and if the former had affected their nervous systems at all, they gave no signs.

Carmody looked once at the young woman and yelled, "Doctor Blake! Get Blake at once!"

Like a genie summoned by the mention of his name, Blake was there with his little black kit. He at once called for a stretcher; Kate, moaning and rolling her head from side to side, was carried into the ship's hospital. Pete raged until Blake ordered him out of the room.

"I'll get a gun and kill those beasts. I'll track them down if it takes me a week. Or a year! I'll trap them and . . ."

Carmody pushed him out of the room and into the lounge, where he made the youth sit down. With a shaking hand, he lit two cigarettes.

"It would do you no good to kill them," he said. "They'd be up and around in a few days. Besides, they're just animals who were obeying their master's commands."

He puffed on his cigarette while with one hand he snapped his glow-wire lighter shut and put it back in his pocket.

"I'm just as shaken up as you. Recent events have been too fast and too inexplicable for my nervous system to take them in stride. But I wouldn't worry about Kate being hurt, if I were you. I know she looked pretty bad, but I'm sure she'll be all right and in a very short time, too."

"You blind optimistic ass!" shouted Pete. "You *saw* what happened to her!"

"She's suffering from hysterics, not from any physical effects of her miscarriage," replied Carmody calmly. "I'll bet that in a few minutes, when Blake has her calmed down with a sedative, she'll walk out of the hospital in as good a condition as she was in this morning. I know she will. You see, son, I've had a talk with a being who is not God but who convinces you that *he* is the nearest equivalent."

Pete became slack-jawed. "What? What're you talking about?"

"I know I sound as if I were talking nonsense. But I've met the owner of Abatos. Or rather *he* has talked to me, and what *he* has shown the bishop and me is, to understate, staggering. There are a hundred things we'll have to let you and everybody else know in due time. Meanwhile, I can give you an idea of *his* powers. They range in terrible spectrum from such petty, but amazing, deeds as curing my toothache with a mere laying on of hands to bringing dead bones back to life and reclothing them with flesh. I have

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seen the dead arise and go forth. Though, I must admit, probably to be eaten again."

Frowning, he added, "The bishop and I were permitted to perform — or should I say commit? — a resurrection ourselves. The sensation is not indescribable, but I prefer not to say anything about it at present."

Pete rose with clenched fists, his cigarette shredding under the pressure.

"You must be crazy."

"That would be nice if I were, for I'd be relieved of an awful responsibility. And if the choice were mine, I'd take incurable insanity. But I'm not to get off so easily."

Suddenly, Father John lost his calmness; he looked as if he were going to break into many pieces. He buried his face in his hands, while Pete stared stunned. Then the priest as abruptly lowered his hands and presented once again the sharp-nosed, round and smiling features the world knew so well.

"Fortunately, the ultimate decision will not be mine but His Excellency's. And though it is cowardly to be glad because I may pass the buck on to him, I must confess that I will be glad. His is the power in this case, and though power has its glory, it also has its burdens and griefs. I wouldn't want to be in the bishop's shoes at this moment."

Pete didn't hear the priest's last words. He was gazing at the hospital door, just opening. Kate stepped out, a little pale but walking steadily. Pete ran to her; they folded each other in their arms; then she was crying.

"Are you all right, honey?" Pete kept saying over and over.

"Oh, I feel fine," she replied, still weeping. "I don't understand why, but I do. I'm suddenly healed. There's nothing wrong down there. It was as if a hand passed over me, and strength flowed out of it, and all was well with my body."

Blake, who had appeared behind her, nodded in agreement.

"Oh, Pete," sobbed Kate, "I'm all right, but I lost our baby! And I know it was because we stole that money from Daddy. It was our punishment. It was bad enough running away, though we had to do that because we loved each other. But we should never have taken that money!"

"Hush, honey, you're talking too much. Let's go to our cabin where you can rest."

Gently he directed her out of the lounge while he glared defiantly at Carmody.

"Oh, Pete," she wailed, "all that money, and now we're on a planet where it's absolutely no good at all. Only a burden."

"You talk too much, baby," said Pete, a roughness replacing the gentleness in his voice. They disappeared down the corridor. Carmody said nothing. Eyes downcast, he, too, walked to his cabin and shut the door behind him.

A half hour later, he came out and

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asked for Captain Tu. Told that Tu was outside, he left the *Gull* and found an attentive group at the edge of the meadow on the other side of the ship. Mrs. Recka and the first mate were the center of attraction.

"We were sitting under one of those big jelly trees and passing the bottle back and forth and talking of this and that," said Givens. "Mostly about what we'd do if we found out we were stranded here for the rest of our lives."

Somebody snickered. Givens flushed but continued evenly.

"Suddenly, Mrs. Recka and I became very sick. We vomited violently and broke out into a cold sweat. By the time we'd emptied our stomachs, we were sure the whisky had been poisoned. We thought we'd die in the woods, perhaps never to be found, for we were quite a distance from the ship and in a rather secluded spot.

"But as suddenly as it had come, the illness went away. We felt completely happy and healthy. The only difference was, we both were absolutely certain that we'd never again want to touch a drop of whisky."

"Or any other alcoholic drink," added Mrs. Recka, shuddering.

Those who knew of her weakness gazed curiously and somewhat doubtfully at her. Carmody tapped the captain's elbow and drew him off to one side.

"Is the radio and other electronic equipment working by now?" he asked.

"They resumed operation about the time you two showed up. But the translator still refuses to budge. I was worried when you failed to report through your wrist radios. For all I knew, some beast of prey had killed you, or you'd fallen into the lake and drowned. I organized a search party, but we'd not gone half a mile before we noticed the needles on our ship-finders whirling like mad. So we returned. I didn't want to be lost in the woods, for my primary duty is to the ship, of course. And I couldn't send out a copter crew, for the copters simply refused to run. They're working all right now, though. What do you think of all this?"

"Oh, I know *who* is doing this. And *why*."

"For God's sake, man, *who?*"

"I don't know if it is for God's sake or not. . . ." Carmody glanced at his watch. "Come with me. There is someone you must meet."

"Where are we going?"

"Just follow me. *He* wants a few words with you because you are the captain, and your decision will have to be given also. Moreover, I want you to know just what we are up against."

"Who is *he?* A native of Abatos?"

"Not exactly, though *he* has lived here longer than any native creature of this planet."

Tu adjusted the angle of his cap and brushed dust flakes from his

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uniform. He strode through the corridors of the noisy jungle as if the trees were on parade and he were inspecting them.

"If *he* has been here longer than ten thousand years," said the captain unconsciously stressing the personal pronoun as Carmody did, "then *he* must have arrived long before English and its descendant tongue, Lingo, were spoken, when the Aryan speech was still only the property of a savage tribe in Central Asia. How can we talk with him? Telepathy?"

"No. *He* learned Lingo from the survivor of the crash of the *Hoyle*, the only ship *he* ever permitted to get through."

"And where is this man?" asked Tu, annoyedly glancing at a choir of howling monkeys on an overhead branch.

"No man. A woman, a medical officer. After a year here, she committed suicide. Built a funeral pyre and burned herself to death. There was nothing left of her but ashes."

"Why?"

"I imagine because total cremation was the only way she could put herself beyond *his* reach. Because otherwise *he* might have placed her bones in a jelly tree and brought her back to life."

Tu halted. "My mind understands you, but my sense of belief is numb. Why did she kill herself when, if you are not mistaken, she had eternal life before her or at least a reasonable facsimile thereof?"

"*He* — *Father* — says that she could not endure the thought of living forever on Abatos with *him* as her only human, or humanoid, companion. I know how she felt. It would be like sharing the world with only God to talk to. Her sense of inferiority and her loneliness must have been overwhelming."

Carmody stopped suddenly and became lost in thought, his head cocked to one side, his left eyelid drooping.

"Hmm. That's strange. *He* said that we, too, could have *his* powers, become like *him*. Why didn't *he* teach her? Was it because *he* didn't want to share? Come to think of it, *he*'s made no offers of dividing *his* dominions. Only wants substitution. Hmm. All or none. Either *he* or . . . or what?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" barked Captain Tu irritatedly.

"You may be right at that," said Carmody, absently. "Look, there's a jelly tree. What do you say we do a little poking and prying, heh? It's true that *he* forbade any needle-nosing on the part of us extra-Abatosians; it's true that this may be another garden of Eden and that I, a too true son of Adam, alas, may be re-enacting another fall from grace, may be driven out with flaming swords — though I wouldn't mind being expelled back to some familiar planet — may even be blasted with lightning for blaspheming against the local deity. Nevertheless, I think a little delving into the con-

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tents of that cavity may be as profitable as any dentist's work. What do you say, Captain? The consequences could be rather disastrous."

"If you mean am I afraid, all I can say is that you know better than that," growled Tu. "I'll let no priest get ahead of me in guts. Go ahead. I'll back you up all the way."

"Ah," said Carmody, walking briskly up to the foot of the enormous redwood, "ah, but you've not seen and talked to the Father of Abatos. It's not a matter of backing me up, for there's little you could do if we should be discovered. It's a matter of giving me moral courage, of shaming me with your presence so that I won't run like a rabbit if *he* should catch me red-handed."

With one hand he took a small vial out of his pocket and with the other a flashlight, whose beam he pointed into the dark O. Tu looked over his shoulder.

"It quivers, almost as if it were alive," said the captain in a low voice.

"It emits a faint humming, too. If you put your hand lightly on its surface, you can feel the vibration."

"What are those whitish things embedded in it? Bones?"

"Yes, the hollow goes rather deep, doesn't it? Must be below the surface of the ground. See that dark mass in one corner? An antelope of some sort, I'd say. Looks to me as if the flesh were being built up in layers from the inside out; the outer muscles and skin aren't re-created yet."

The priest scooped out a sample of the jelly, capped the vial, and put it back in his pocket. He did not rise but kept playing his beam over the hollow.

"This stuff really makes a Geiger counter dance. Not only that, it radiates electromagnetic waves. I think that radio waves from this jelly damped out our wrist speakers and sonos and played havoc with our ship-finders. Hey, wait a minute! Notice those very minute white threads that run through the whole mass. Nerve-like, aren't they?"

Before Carmody could protest, Tu stooped and dipped out a handful of the quivering gelatinous mass. "Yeah. Do you know where I've seen something like this before? This stuff reminds me of the protein transistors we use in the translator."

Carmody frowned. "Aren't they the only living parts of the machine? Seems to me I read that the translator won't rotate the ship through perpendicular space unless these transistors are used."

"Mechanical transistors could be used," corrected Tu. "But they would occupy a space as large as the spaceship itself. Protein transistors take up very little area; you could carry the *Gull's* on your back. Actually, that part of the translator is not only a series of transistors but a memory bank. Its function is to 'remember' normal space. It has to retain a simulacrum of real or 'horizontal' space as distinguished from perpendicular. While one end of the

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translator is 'flopping us over,' as the phrase goes, the protein end is reconstructing an image of what the space at our destination looks like, down to the last electron. Sounds very much like sympathetic magic, doesn't it? Build an effigy, and shortly you establish an affinity between reality and counterfeit."

"What happened to the protein banks?"

"Nothing that we could tell. They functioned normally."

"Perhaps the currents aren't getting through. Did the engineer check the synapses or just take a reading on the biostatic charge of the whole? The charge could be normal, you know, yet any transmission could be blocked."

"That's the engineer's province. I wouldn't dream of questioning his work, any more than he would mine."

Carmody rose. "I'd like to talk to the engineer. I've a layman's theory, but like most amateurs, I may be overly enthusiastic because of my ignorance. If you don't care, I'd rather not discuss it now. Especially here, where the forest may have ears, and . . ."

Though the captain had not even opened his mouth, the priest had raised his finger for silence in a characteristic gesture. Suddenly, it was apparent that he *did* have his silence, for there was not a sound in the woods except the faint soughing of the wind through the leaves.

"*He* is around," whispered Carmody. "Throw that jelly back in, and we'll get away from this tree."

Tu raised his hand to do so. At that moment a rifle shot cracked nearby. Both men jumped. "My God, what fool's doing that?" cried Tu. He said something else, but his voice was lost in the bedlam that broke out through the woods, the shrieks of birds, the howling of monkeys, the trumpetings, neighings, and roarings of thousands of other animals. Then, as abruptly as it had begun, it stopped, almost as if by signal. Silence fell. Then, a single cry. A man's.

"It's Masters," groaned Carmody.

There was a rumble, as of some large beast growling deep in its chest. One of the leopard-like creatures with the round ears and the gray tufts on its legs padded out from the brush. It held Pete Masters' dangling body between its jaws as easily as a cat holds a mouse. Paying no attention to the two men, it ran past them to the foot of an oak, where it stopped and laid the youth down before another intruder.

Father stood motionless as stone, one nailless hand resting upon his long red-gold beard, his deeply sunken eyes downcast, intent on the figure on the grass. He did not move until Pete, released from his paralysis, writhed in a passion of abjectness and called out for mercy. Then he stooped and touched the youth briefly on the back of his head. Pete leaped to his feet and, holding his head and screaming as if in pain, ran

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away through the trees. The leopardess remained couchant, blinking slowly like a fat and lazy housecat.

Father spoke to her. While he stalked off into the woods, she turned her green eyes upon the two men. Neither felt like testing her competency as a guard.

Father stopped under a tree overgrown with vines from which hung fat heavy pods like white hairless coconuts. Though the lowest was twelve feet high, he had no difficulty in reaching up and squeezing it in his hand. It cracked open with a loud report, and water shot from the crushed shell. Tu and Carmody paled; the captain muttered, "I'd rather tackle that big cat than *him*."

The giant wheeled, and, washing his hands with the water, strode towards them. "Would you like to crush coconuts in one hand, too, Captain?" he thundered. "That is nothing. I can show you how you may also do that. I can tear that young beech tree out of the ground by the roots. I can speak a word to Zeda here, and she will heel like a dog. That is nothing. I can teach you the power. I can hear your whisper even at a distance of a hundred yards, as you realize by now. And I could catch you within ten seconds, even if you had a head start and I were sitting down. That is nothing. I can tell instantly where any of my daughters are on the face of Abatos, what state of health they are in, and when they've died. That is nothing. You can do the same, provided you become like that priest there. You could even raise my dead, if you had the will to be like Father John. I may take your hand and show you how you could bring life again to the dead body, though I do not care to touch you."

"For God's sake, say no," breathed Carmody. "It's enough that the bishop and I should have been exposed to that temptation."

Father laughed. Tu grabbed hold of Carmody's hand. He could not have answered the giant if he had wished, for his mouth opened and closed like a fish's out of water, and his eyeballs popped.

"There's something about his voice that turns the bowels to water and loosens the knees," said the priest, then fell silent. Father stood above them, wiping his hands on his beard. Aside from that magnificent growth and a towering roach on his head, he was absolutely bald. His pale red skin was unblemished, glowing with perfect blood beneath the thin surface. His high-bridged nose was septumless, but the one nostril was a flaring Gothic one. Red teeth glistened in his mouth; a blue-veined tongue shot out for a moment like a flame; then the black-red lips writhed and closed. All this was strange but not enough to make these star-traveled men uncomfortable. The voice and the eyes stunned them, the thunder that seemed to shake their bones so they rattled and the black eyes starred with silver splinters. Stone come to flesh.

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"Don't worry, Carmody. I will not show Tu how to raise the dead. Unlike you and André, he'd not be able to do it, anyhow. Neither would any of the others, for I've studied them, and I know. But I have need of you, Tu. I will tell you why, and when I have told you, you will see there is nothing else for you to do. I will convince you by reason, not by force, for I hate violence, and indeed am required by the nature of my being not to use it. Unless an emergency demands it."

Father talked. An hour later, he stopped. Without waiting for either of them to say a word, even if they'd been capable, he turned and strode away; the leopardess a respectable distance behind his heels. Presently, the normal calls of the wood animals began. The two men shook themselves and silently walked back to the ship. At the meadow's edge, Carmody said, "There's only one thing to do. Call a Council of the Question of Jairus. Fortunately, you fill the bill for the kind of layman required as moderator. I'll ask the bishop's permission, but I'm sure he'll agree it's the only thing to do. We can't contact our superiors and refer a decision to their judgment. The responsibility rests on us."

"It's a terrible burden," said the captain.

At the ship they asked about the bishop, to be told he had walked away into the forest only a short time before. The wrist radios were working, but no answer came from André. Alarmed, the two decided to go back into the forest to search for him. They followed the path to the lake, while Tu checked every now and then through his radio with a copter circling overhead. They'd reported the bishop was not by the lakeshore, but Carmody thought he might be on his way to it or perhaps was just sitting some place and meditating.

About a mile from the *Gull* they found him lying at the foot of an exceptionally tall jelly tree. Tu halted suddenly.

"He's having an attack, Father."

Carmody turned away and sat down on the grass, his back to the bishop. He lit a cigarette but dropped it and crushed it beneath his heel.

"I forgot *he* doesn't want us to smoke in the woods. Not for fear of fire. *He* doesn't like the odor of tobacco."

Tu stood by the priest, his gaze clinging to the writhing figure beneath the tree. "Aren't you going to help him? He'll chew off his tongue or dislocate a bone."

Carmody hunched his shoulders and shook his head. "You forget that *he* cured our ills to demonstrate *his* powers. My rotten tooth, Mrs. Recka's alcoholism, His Excellency's seizures."

"But, but . . ."

"His Excellency has entered into this so-called attack voluntarily and is in no danger of breaking bones or lacerating his tongue. I wish that were all there were to it. Then I'd

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know what to do. Meanwhile, I suggest you do the decent thing and turn your back, too. I didn't care for this the first time I witnessed it; I still don't."

"Maybe you won't help, but I sure as hell am going to," said Tu. He took a step, halted, sucking in his breath.

Carmody turned to look, then rose. "It's all right. Don't be alarmed."

The bishop had given a final violent spasm, a thrusting of the pelvis that raised his arched body completely off the ground. At the same time he gave a loud racking sob. When he fell back, he crumpled into silence and motionlessness.

But it was not towards him but towards the hollow in the tree that Tu stared. Out of it was crawling a great white snake with black triangular markings on its back. Its head was large as a watermelon; its eyes glittered glassy green; its scales dripped with white-threaded jelly.

"My God," said Tu, "isn't there any end to it? It keeps coming and coming. Must be forty or fifty feet long."

His hand went to the sono-gun in his pocket. Carmody restrained him with another shake of his head.

"That snake intends no harm. On the contrary, if I understand these animals, it knows dimly that it has been given life again and feels a sense of gratitude. Perhaps *he* has made them aware that *he* resurrects them so that *he* may warm himself in their automatic worship. But, of course, *he* would never stand for what that beast is doing. *He*, if you've not noticed, can't endure to touch *his* secondhand progeny. Did you perceive that after *he* had touched Masters, *he* washed *his* hands with coconut water? Flowers and trees are the only things *he* handles."

The snake had thrust its head above the bishop's and was touching his face with its flickering tongue. André groaned and opened his eyes. Seeing the reptile, he shuddered with fear, then grew still and allowed it to caress him. After determining that it meant him no harm, he stroked its back.

"Well, if the bishop should take over from Father, he at least will give these animals what they have always wanted and have not gotten from *him*, a tenderness and affection. His Excellency does not hate these females. Not yet."

In a louder voice, he added, "I hope to God that such a thing does not come to pass."

Hissing with alarm, the snake slid off into the grass. André sat up, shook his head as if to clear it, rose to greet them. His face had lost the softness it had while he was caressing the serpent. It was stern, and his voice was challenging.

"Do you think it is right to come spying upon me?"

"Your pardon, Your Excellency, we were not spying. We were looking for you because we have decided that the situation demands a Council of the Question of Jairus."

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Tu added, "We were concerned because Your Excellency seemed to be having another attack."

"Was I? Was I? But I thought that *he* had done away . . . I mean . . ."

Sadly, Carmody nodded. "*He* has. I wonder if Your Excellency would forgive me if I gave an opinion. I think that you were not having an epileptoid seizure coincidentally with sparking the snake with its new life. Your seeming attack was only a mock-up of your former illness.

"I see you don't understand. Let me put it this way. The doctor on Wildenwooly had thought that your sickness was psychosomatic in origin and had ordered you to Ygdrasil where a more competent man could treat it. Before you left, you told me that he thought that your symptoms were symbolic behavior and pointed the way to the seat of your malady, a suppressed . . ."

"I think you should stop there," said the bishop, coldly.

"I had intended to go no further."

They began walking back to the ship. The two priests dropped behind the captain, who strode along with his eyes fixed straight ahead of him.

The bishop said, hesitantly, "You too experienced the glory — perhaps perilous, but nevertheless a glory — of bringing the dead back to life. I watched you, as you did me. You were not unmoved. True, you did not fall to the ground and become semi-conscious. But you trembled and moaned in the grip of ecstasy."

He cast his eyes to the ground, then, as if ashamed of his hesitancy, raised them to glare unflinchingly.

"Before your conversion, you were very much a man of this world. Tell me, John, is not this fathering something like being with a woman?"

Carmody looked to one side.

"I want neither your pity nor your revulsion," said André. "Just the truth."

Carmody sighed deeply.

"Yes, the two experiences are very similar. But the fathering is even more intimate because once entered upon it there is no control at all, absolutely no withdrawal from the intimacy; your whole being, mind and body, are fused and focused upon the event. The feeling of oneness — so much desired in the other and so often lacking — is inescapable here. You feel as if you were the recreator and the recreated. Afterwards, you have a part of the animal in you — as you well know — because there is a little spark in your brain that is a piece of its life, and when the spark moves you know that the animal you raised is moving. And when it dims you know it is sleeping, and when it flares you know it is in a panic or some other intense emotion. And when the spark dies, you know the beast has died too.

"Father's brain is a constellation of such sparks, of billions of stars that image brightly their owners'

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vitality. *He* knows where every individual unit of life is on this planet, *he* knows when it is gone, and when *he* does, *he* waits until the bones have been refleshed, and then *he* fathers forth . . ."

"*He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:*
Praise him!" Andre burst out.

Startled, Carmody raised his eyes. "Hopkins, I think, would be distressed to hear you quoting his lines in this context. I think perhaps he might retort with a passage from another of his poems.

"*Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best,*
But uncumbered: meadow-down is not distressed
For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bones risen."

"Your quote supports mine. *His bones risen.* What more do you need?

"*But uncumbered.* What is the penalty for this ecstasy? This world is beautiful, yes, but is it not sterile, dead-ended? Well, never mind that now. I wished to remind Your Excellency that this power and glory come from a sense of union and control over brutes. The world is *his* bed, but who would lie forever in it? And why does *he* now wish to leave it, if it is so desirable? For good? Or for evil?"

V

An hour later, the three entered the bishop's cabin and sat down at the bare round table in its center. Carmody was carrying a little black bag, which he put under his chair without commenting on it. All were dressed in black robes, and as soon as André had given the opening ritual prayer, they put on the masks of the founder of the order. For a moment there was silence as they looked at each other from behind the assumed anonymous safety of identical features: brown skin, kinky hair, flat nose, thick lips. And with the intense West Africanness of the face, the maker of the masks had managed to impart to them the legendary gentleness and nobility of soul that had belonged to Jairus Cbwaka.

Captain Tu spoke through rigid lips.

"We are gathered here in the name of his love and of His love to formulate the temptation, if any, that confronts us, and take action, if any, against it. Let us speak as brothers, remembering each time we look across the table and see the face of the founder that he never lost his temper except upon one occasion nor forgot his love except upon one occasion. Let us remember his agonies caused by that forgetfulness and what he has directed us, priest and layman, to do. Let us be worthy of his spirit in the presence of the seeming of his flesh."

"I would like it better if you didn't rattle through the words so fast," said the bishop. "Such a pace destroys the spirit of the thing."

"It doesn't remedy anything for you to criticize my conducting."

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"Rebuke well taken. I ask you to forgive me."

"Of course," Tu said, somewhat uncomfortably. "Of course. Well, to business."

"I speak for Father," said the bishop.

"I speak against Father," said Carmody.

"Speak for Father," said Tu.

"Thesis: Father represents the forces of good. *He* has offered the Church the monopoly of the secret of resurrection."

"Antithesis."

"Father represents the forces of evil, for *he* will unloose upon the Galaxy a force which will destroy the Church if she tries to monopolize it. Moreover, even if she should refuse to have anything to do with it, it will destroy mankind everywhere and consequently our Church."

"Development of thesis."

"All *his* actions have been for good. Point. *He* has cured our illnesses major and minor. Point. *He* stopped Masters and Lejeune from carnal intercourse and perhaps did the same to Recka and Givens. Point. *He* made the former confess they had stolen money from Lejeune's father, and since then Lejeune has come to me for spiritual advice. She seemed to consider very seriously my suggestion that she have nothing to do with Masters and to return to her father, if the chance came, in an attempt to solve their problems with his consent. Point. She is studying a manual I gave her and may be led to the Church. That will be Father's doings and not Masters', who has neglected the Church though he is nominally a member of our body. Point. Father is forgiving, for *he* didn't allow the leopardess to harm Masters, even after the youth's attempt at killing *him*. And *he* has said that the captain may as well release Masters from the brig, for *he* fears nothing, and our criminal code is beneath his comprehension. *He* is sure that Masters won't try again. Therefore, why not forget about his stealing a gun from the ship's storeroom and let him loose? We are using force to get our goal of punishment, and that is not necessary, for according to the laws of psychodynamics which *he* has worked out during ten thousand years of solitude, a person who uses violence as a means to an end is self-punished, is robbed of a portion of his powers. Even *his* original act of getting the ship down here has hurt *him* so much that it will be some time before he recovers the full use of *his* psychic energies.

"I enter a plea that we accept *his* offer. There can be no harm because *he* wishes to go as a passenger. Though I, of course, possess no personal funds, I will write out an authorization on the Order for *his* ticket. And I will take *his* place upon Abatos while *he* is gone.

"Remember, too, that the decision of this particular Council will not commit the Church to accept *his*

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offer. We will merely put *him* under our patronage for a time."

"Antithesis."

"I have a blanket statement that will answer most of thesis's points. That is, that the worst evil is that which adopts the lineaments of good, so that one has to look hard to distinguish the true face beneath the mask. Father undoubtedly learned from the *Hoyle* survivor our code of ethics. He has avoided close contact with us so we may not get a chance to study his behavior in detail.

"However, these are mostly speculations. What can't be denied is that this act of resurrection is a drug, the most powerful and insidious that mankind has ever been exposed to. Once one has known the ecstasies attendant upon it, one wishes for more. And as the number of such acts is limited to the number of dead available, one wishes to enlarge the ranks of the dead so that one may enjoy more acts. And Father's set-up here is one that 'combines the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity.' Once a man has tasted the act, he will seriously consider turning his world into one like Abatos.

"Do we want that? I say no. I predict that if Father leaves here, *he* will open the way to such a possibility. Won't each man who has the power begin thinking of himself as a sort of god? Won't he become as Father, dissatisfied with the original unruly rude chaotic planet as he found it? Won't he find progress and imperfection unbearable and remodel the bones of his creatures to remove all evolutionary vestiges and form perfect skeletons? Won't he suppress mating among the animals — and perhaps among his fellow human beings — while allowing the males to die unresurrected until none but the more pliable and amenable females are left and there is no chance of young being born? Won't he make a garden out of his planet, a beautiful but sterile and unprogressive paradise? Look, for example, at the method of hunting that the fat and lazy beasts of prey use. Consider its disastrous results, evolutionarily speaking. In the beginning they picked out the slowest and stupidest herbivores to kill. Did this result in the survivors breeding swifter and more intelligent young? Not at all. For the dead were raised, and caught and killed again. And again. So that now when a leopardess or bitch wolf goes out to eat, the unconditioned run away and the conditioned stand trembling and paralyzed and meekly submit to slaughter like tame animals in a stockyard. And the uneaten return to graze unconcernedly within leaping distance of the killer while she is devouring their sister. This is a polished planet, where the same event slides daily through the same smooth groove.

"Yet even the lover of perfection, Father, has become bored and wishes to find a pioneer world where *he* may labor until *he* has brought it

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to the same state as Abatos. Will this go on forever until the Galaxy will no longer exhibit a multitude of worlds, each breathtakingly different from the other, but will show you everywhere a duplicate of Abatos, not one whit different? I warn you that that is one of the very real perils.

"Minor points. *He* is a murderer because *he* caused Kate Lejeune to miscarry, and . . ."

"Counterpoint. *He* maintains that it was an accident that Kate lost her foetus, that *he* had his two beasts chase her and Masters out of the woods because they were having carnal intercourse. And *he* could not tolerate that. Point. Such an attitude is in *his* favor and shows that *he* is good and on the side of the Church and of God."

"Point. It would not have mattered to *him* if Pete and Kate had been bound in holy matrimony. Carnal intercourse *per se* is objectionable to *him*. Why, I don't know. Perhaps the act offends his sense of property because *he* is the sole giver of life on this world. But I say *his* interference was evil because it resulted in the loss of a human life, and that *he* knew it would . . ."

"Point," said the bishop, somewhat heatedly. "This is, as far as we know, a planet without true death and true sin. We have brought those two monsters with us, and *he* cannot endure either one."

"Point. We did not ask to come but were forced."

"Order," said the moderator. "The Question first, then the formulation of the temptation, as laid down in the rules. If we say yes, and Father goes with us, one of us must remain to take *his* place. Otherwise, so *he* insists, this world will go to wrack and ruin in *his* absence."

The moderator paused, then said, "For some reason, *he* has limited the choice of *his* substitutes to you two."

"Point," said the bishop. "We are the only candidates because we have sworn total abstinence from carnal intercourse. Father seems to think that women are even greater vessels of evil than men. *He* says that bodily copulation involves a draining off of the psychic energy needed for the act of resurrection and implies also that there is something dirty — or perhaps I should say, just too physical and animal — about the act. I do not, of course, think *his* attitude entirely justified, nor do I agree at all that women are on the same plane with animals. But you must remember that *he* has not seen a woman for ten thousand years, that perhaps the female of his own species might justify *his* reaction. I gathered from *his* conversation that there is a wide gap between the sexes of *his* kind on *his* home planet. Even so, he is kind to our women passengers. *He* will not touch them, true, but *he* says that any physical contact with us is painful to *him*, because it robs *him* of *his*, what shall I say, sanctity? On the other hand, with flowers and trees . . ."

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"Point. What you have told us indicates *his* aberrated nature."

"Point, point. You have confessed you dare not say such a thing to *his* face, that you are awed by the sense of the power that emanates from *him*. Point. *He* acts as one who has taken a vow of chastity; perhaps *his* nature is such that too close a contact does besmirch *him*, figuratively speaking. I take this religious attitude to be one more sign in *his* favor."

"Point. The devil himself may be chaste. But for what reason? Because he loves God or because he fears dirt?"

"Time," said Tu, "time for the chance of reversal. Has thesis or antithesis altered his mind on any or all points? Do not be backward in admitting it. Pride must fall before love of truth."

The bishop's voice was firm. "No change. And let me reaffirm that I do not think Father is God. But *he* has Godlike powers. And the Church should use them."

Carmody rose and gripped the table's edge. His head was thrust aggressively forward, his stance was strange in contrast to the tender melancholy of the mask.

"Antithesis reports no change, too. Very well. Thesis has stated that Father has Godlike powers. I say, so has man, within limits. Those limits are what he may do to material things through material means. I say that Father is limited to those means, that there is nothing at all supernatural about *his* so-called miracles. As a matter of fact, man can do what Father is doing, even if on a primitive scale.

"I have been arguing on a spiritual level, hoping to sway thesis with spiritual points before I revealed to you my discoveries. But I have failed. Very well. I will tell you what I have found out. Perhaps then thesis will change his mind."

He stooped and picked up the little black bag and laid it on the table before him. While he spoke, he kept one hand upon it, as if to enforce attention towards it.

"Father's powers, I thought, might be only extensions of what we humans may do. *His* were more subtle because *he* had the backing of a much older science than ours. After all, we are able to rejuvenate the old so that our life span is about a hundred and fifty. We build organs of artificial flesh. Within a limited period we may revive the dead, provided we can freeze them quickly enough and then work on them. We've even built a simple brain of flesh — one on the level of a toad's. And the sense of the numinous and of panic is nothing new. We have our own sonobeams for creating a like effect. Why could he not be using similar methods?

"Just because we saw *him* naked and without a machine in *his* hand didn't mean that *his* effects were produced by mental broadcast. We couldn't conceive of science without metal mechanisms. But what if *he*

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had other means? What about the jelly trees, which display electromagnetic phenomena? What about the faint humming we heard?

"So I borrowed a microphone and oscilloscope from the engineer, rigged up a sound detector, put it in the bag, and set out to nose around. And I observed that His Excellency was also making use of his time before the Question, that he was talking again to *him*. And while doing so, the jelly trees nearby were emitting subsonics at four and thirteen cycles. You know what those do. The first massages the bowels and causes peristalsis. The second stimulates a feeling of vague overpowering oppression. There were other sonics, too, some sub, some super.

"I left Father's neighborhood to investigate elsewhere. Also, to do some thinking. It's significant, I believe, that we have had little chance or inclination to do any meditating since we've been here. Father has been pushing us, has kept us off balance. Obviously, *he* wants to keep our minds blurry with too rapid a pace of events.

"I did some fast thinking, and I concluded that the resurrection act itself was not touched off by *his* spark of genesis. Far from it. It is completely automatic, and it comes when the newly formed body is ready for a shock of bio-electricity from the protoplasm-jelly.

"But *he* knows when it is ready and taps the wavelengths of life blooming anew, feeds upon them. How? There must be a two-way linkage between *his* brainwaves and the jelly's. We know that we think in symbols, that a mental symbol is basically a complex combination of brainwaves issuing as series of single images. *He* triggers off certain pre-set mechanisms in the jelly with *his* thoughts, that is, with a mental projection of a symbol.

"Yet not anyone may do it, for we two priests, dedicated to abstention from carnal intercourse, were the only ones able to tap in on the waves. Evidently, a man has to have a peculiar psychosomatic disposition. Why? I don't know. Maybe there is something spiritual to the process. But don't forget that the devil is spiritual. However, the mind-body's actions are still a dark continent. I can't solve them, only speculate.

"As for *his* ability to cure illnesses at a distance, *he* must diagnose and prescribe through the medium of the tree-jelly. It receives and transmits, takes in the abnormal or unhealthy waves our sick cells broadcast and sends out the healthy waves to suppress or cancel the unhealthy. There's no miracle about the process. It works in accordance with materialistic science.

"I surmise that when Father first came here, *he* was fully aware that the trees originated the ecstasy, that *he* was merely tuning in. But after millennia of solitude and an almost continuous state of drugging ecstasy, *he* deluded *himself* into thinking that it was *he* who sparked the new life.

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"There are a few other puzzling points. How did *he* catch our ship? I don't know. But *he* knew about the translator motor from the *Hoyle* survivor and was thus able to set up the required wavelengths to neutralize the workings of the protein 'normal space' memory banks. *He* could have had half the jelly trees of Abatos broadcasting all the time, a trap that would inevitably catch a passing ship."

Tu said, "What happened to *his* original spaceship?"

"If we left the *Gull* to sit out in the rain and sun for ten thousand years, what would happen to it?"

"It'd be a heap of rust. Not even that."

"Right. Now I suspect strongly that Father, when *he* first came here, had a well-equipped laboratory on his ship. His science was able to mutate genes at will, and he used his tools on the native trees to mutate them into these jelly trees. That also explains why he was able to change the animals' genetic pattern so that their bodies lost their evolutionary vestiges, became perfectly functional organisms."

The little man in the mask sat down. The bishop rose. His voice was choked.

"Admitting that your researches and surmises have indicated that Father's powers are unspiritual gimmickry — and in all fairness it must be admitted that you seem to be right — admitting this, then, I still speak for Father."

Carmody's mask cocked to the left. "What?"

"Yes. We owe it to the Church that she get this wonderful tool in her hands, this tool which, like any thing in this universe, may be used for evil or for good. Indeed, it is mandatory that she gets control of it, so that she may prevent those who would misuse it from doing so, so that she may become stronger and attract more to her fold. Do you think that eternal life is no attraction?

"Now — you say that Father has lied to us. I say *he* has not. *He* never once told us that *his* powers were purely spiritual. Perhaps, being of an alien species, *he* misunderstands our strength of comprehension and took it for granted that we would see how *he* operates.

"However, that is not the essence of my thesis. The essence is that we must take Father along and give the Church a chance to decide whether or not to accept *him*. There is no danger in doing that, for *he* will be alone among billions. And if we should leave *him* here, then we will be open to rebuke, perhaps even a much stronger action from the Church, for having been cowards enough to turn down *his* gift.

"I will remain here, even though my motives are questioned by those who have no right to judge me. I am a tool of God as much as Father is; it is right that we both be used to the best of our abilities; Father is doing no good for Church or man

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while isolated here; I will endure my loneliness while waiting for your return with the thought that I am doing this as a servant who takes joy in his duty."

"What a joy!" Carmody shouted. "No! I say that we reject Father once and for all. I doubt very much that *he* will allow us to go, for *he* will think that, faced with spending the rest of our lives here and then dying — for I don't think *he*'ll resurrect us unless we say yes — we will agree. And *he*'ll see to it that we are cooped up inside the ship, too. We won't dare step outside, for we'll be bombarded with panic-waves or attacked by *his* beasts. However, that remains to be seen. What I'd like to ask thesis is this: Why can't we just refuse *him* and leave the problem of getting *him* off Abatos to some other ship? He can easily trap another. Or perhaps, if we get to go home, we may send a government craft to investigate."

"Father has explained to me that we represent *his* only sure chance. *He* may have to wait another ten millennia before another ship is trapped. Or forever. It works this way. You know that translation of a vessel from one point in normal space to the other occurs simultaneously, as far as outside observers are affected. Theoretically, the ship rotates the two coordinates of its special axis, ignoring time, disappears from its launching point, reappearing at the same time at its destination. However, there is a discharging effect, a simulacrum of the ship, built of electromagnetic fields, which radiates at six points from the starting place, and speeds at an ever-accelerating rate at six right angles from there. These are called 'ghosts.' They've never been seen, and we've no instruments that can detect them. Their existence is based on Guizot's equations, which have managed to explain how electromagnetic waves may exceed the speed of light, though we know from Auschweig that Einstein was wrong when he said that the velocity of light was the absolute.

"Now, if you were to draw a straight line from Wildenwooly to Ygdrasil, you would find that Abatos does not lie between, that it is off to one side of the latter. But it is at right angles to it, so that one of the 'ghosts' passes here. The electromagnetic net that the trees sent up stopped it cold. The result was that the *Gull* was literally sucked along the line of power, following this particular ghost to Abatos instead of to Ygdrasil. I imagine that we appeared for a flickering millisecond at our original destination, then were yanked back to here. Of course, we were unaware of that, just as the people on Ygdrasil never saw us.

"Now—the voyages between Ygdrasil and Wildenwooly are infrequent, and the field has to mesh perfectly with the ghost, otherwise the ghost passes between the pulses. So that *his* chances of catching another are very few."

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"Yes, and that is why *he* will never allow us to leave. If we go without him and send a warship back to investigate, it may be able to have defenses built to combat his trees' radiations. So we represent *his* sole ticket. And I say *no* even if we must remain marooned!"

So the talk raged for two hours until Tu asked for the final formulations.

"Very well. We have heard. Antithesis has stated the peril of the temptation as being one that will make man a sterile anarchistic pseudo-god.

"Thesis has stated that the peril is that we may reject a gift which would make our Church once again the universal, in numbers as well as in claim, because she would literally and physically hold the keys to life and death.

"Thesis, please vote."

"I say we accept Father's offer."

"Antithesis."

"No. Refuse."

Tu placed his large and bony hands on the table.

"As moderator and judge, I agree with antithesis."

He removed his mask. The others, as if reluctant to acknowledge both identity and responsibility, slowly took off their disguises. They sat glaring at each, and ignored the captain when he cleared his throat loudly. Like the false faces they had discarded, they had dropped any pretence of brotherly love.

Tu said, "In all fairness, I must point out one thing. That is, that as a layman of the Church, I may concur in the agreement to reject Father as a passenger. But as a captain of the Saxwell Company's vessel, it is my duty when landing upon an unscheduled stop to take on any stranded non-active who wishes to leave, provided he has passage money and there is room for him. That is Commonwealth law."

"I don't think we need worry about anybody paying for *his* passage," said the padre. "Not now. However, if *he* should have the money, *he*'d present you with a nice little dilemma."

"Yes, wouldn't *he?* I'd have to report my refusal, of course. And I'd face trial and might lose my captaincy and would probably be earthbound the rest of my life. Such a thought is — well, unendurable."

André rose. "This has been rather trying. I think I'll go for a walk in the woods. If I meet Father, I will tell *him* our decision."

Tu also stood up. "The sooner the better. Ask *him* to reactivate our translator at once. We won't even bother leaving in orthodox style. We'll translate and get our fixings later. Just so we get away."

Carmody fumbled in his robe for a cigarette. "I think I'll talk to Pete Masters. Might be able to drive some sense into his head. Afterwards, I'll take a walk in the woods, too. There's much hereabouts to learn yet."

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He watched the bishop walk out and grimly shook his head. "It went hard to go against my superior," he said to Tu. "But His Excellency, though a great man, is lacking in the understanding that comes from having sinned much yourself."

He patted his round paunch and smiled as if all were right, though not very convincingly.

"It's not fat alone that is stuffed beneath my belt. There are years of experience of living in the depths packed solidly there. Remember that I survived Dante's Joy. I've had my belly full of evil. At its slightest taste, I regurgitate it. I tell you, Captain, Father is rotten meat, ten thousand years old."

"You sound as if you're not quite certain."

"In this world of shifting appearances and lack of true self-knowledge, who *is*?"

VI

Masters had been released after he had promised Tu that he would make no more trouble. Carmody, not finding the youth inside, walked out and called him over the wrist radio. No reply.

Still carrying his black bag, the padre hurried into the woods as fast as his short legs would go. He hummed as he passed beneath the mighty branches, called out to the birds overhead, stopped once to bow gravely to a tall heron-like bird with dark purple mask-markings over its eyes, then staggered off laughing and holding his sides when it replied with a call exactly like a plunger withdrawing from a stopped drain, finally sat down beneath a beech to wipe his streaming face with a handkerchief.

"Lord, Lord, there are more things in this universe . . . surely You must have a sense of humor," he said out loud. "But then, I mustn't identify a purely human viewpoint with You and make the anthropomorphic fallacy."

He paused, said in a lower tone as if not wanting Anyone to hear. "Well, why not? Aren't we, in one sense, the focus of creation, the Creator's image? Surely He too likes to feel a need for relief and finds it in laughter. Perhaps His laughter does not come out as mere meaningless noise but is manifested on a highly economical and informative level. Perhaps He tosses off a new galaxy, instead of having a belly-laugh. Or substitutes a chuckle with a prodding of a species up the Jacob's ladder of evolution towards a more human state.

"Or, old-fashioned as it sounds, indulges in the sheer joy of a miracle to show His children that this is *not* an absolutely orderly clockwork universe. Miracles are the laughter of God. Hmm, not bad. Now, where did I leave my notebook? I knew it. Back in my cabin. That would have made such a splendid line for an article. Well, no matter. I shall probably recall it, and posterity won't die if I

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don't. But they'll be the poorer, and . . ."

He fell silent as he heard Masters and Lejeune nearby. Rising, he walked towards them, calling out so they wouldn't think he was eavesdropping.

They were facing each other across a tremendous fringe-topped toadstool. Kate had quit talking, but Pete, his face red as his hair, continued angrily as if the priest did not exist. He gestured wildly with one fist, while the other hung by his side, clenching a powersaw's handle.

"That's final! We're not going back to Wildenwooly. And don't think I'm afraid of your father, 'cause I'm afraid of nobody. Sure, he won't press charges against us. He can afford to be noble-hearted. The Commonwealth will prosecute us for him. Are you so stupid you don't remember that it's the law that the Board of Health must take into custody anyone who's been put on notice as guilty of unhealthy practices? Your father must have sent word on to Ygdrasil by now. We'll be detained as soon as we put foot on it. And you and I will be sent to an institution. We won't even get to go together to the same place. They never send partners-in-misdoing to the same resort. And how do I know that I won't have lost you then? Those rehabilitation homes do things to people, change their outlooks. You might lose your love for me. Probably that would be fine with them. They'd say you were gaining a healthy attitude in getting rid of me."

Kate raised her large violet eyes to his. "Oh, Pete, that would never ever happen. Don't talk such stuff. Besides, Daddy wouldn't report us. He knows I'd be taken away for a long time, and he couldn't stand that. He won't inform the government; he'll send his own men after us."

"Yeah? What about that telegram to the *Gull* just before we left?"

"Daddy didn't mention the money. We'd have been held for a juvenile misdemeanor only."

"Sure, and then his thugs would have beaten me up and dropped me off in the Twogee Woods. I suppose you'd like that?"

Tears filled Kate's eyes. "Please, Pete, don't. You know I love you more than anybody else in the world."

"Well, maybe you do, maybe you don't. Anyway, you forget that this priest knows about the money, and his duty is to report us."

"Perhaps I am a priest," said Carmody, "but that doesn't automatically classify me as non-human. I wouldn't dream of reporting you. Needlenose though I am, I am not a malicious troublemaker. I'd like to help you out of your predicament, though just now I must confess to a slight inclination to punch you in the nose for the way you are talking to Kate. However, that is neither

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here nor there. What is important is that I'm under no compulsion to tell the authorities, even though your act was not told to me in confession.

"But I do believe you should follow Kate's advice and go back to her father and confess all and try to come to an agreement. Perhaps he would consent to your marriage if you were to promise him to wait until you had proved yourself capable of supporting Kate happily. And proved that your love for her is based on more than sexual passion. Consider his feelings. He's as much concerned in this as you. More, for he's known her far longer, loved her a greater time."

"Ah, to hell with him and the whole situation!" shouted Pete. He walked off and seated himself under a tree about twenty yards away. Kate wept softly. Carmody offered her a handkerchief, saying, "A trifle sweaty, perhaps, but sanitary with sanctity." He smiled at his own wit with such self-evident enjoyment, mingled with self-mockery, that she could not help smiling back at him. While she dried her tears, she gave him her free hand to hold.

"You are sweet and patient, Kate, and very much in love with a man who is, I'm afraid, afflicted with a hasty and violent temper. Now, tell me true, is not your father much the same? Wasn't that part of the reason you ran away with Pete, to get away from a too-demanding, jealous, hot-headed father? And haven't you found out since that Pete is so much like your father that you have traded one image for its duplicate?"

"You're very perceptive. But I love Pete truly."

"Nevertheless, you should go home. Pete, if he really loves you, will follow you and try to come to an honest and open contract with your father. After all, you must admit that your taking the money was not right."

"No," she said, beginning to weep again, "it wasn't. I don't want to be a weakling and put the blame on Pete, for I did agree to take the money, even if it was his suggestion. I did so in a weak moment. And ever since, it's been bothering me. Even when I was in the cabin with him and should have been deliriously happy, that money bothered me."

Masters jumped up and strode towards them, the powersaw swinging in his hand. It was a wicked-looking tool, with a wide thin adjustable blade spreading out like a fan from a narrow motorbox. He held the saw like a pistol, his hand around the butt and one finger on the trigger.

"Take your paws off her," he said.

Kate withdrew her hand from Carmody's grip, but she faced the youth defiantly. "He isn't hurting me. He's giving me a real warmth and understanding, trying to help."

"I know these old priests. He's taking advantage of you so he can hug and pinch you and . . ."

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"Old?" exploded the padre. "Listen, Masters, I'm only forty . . ."

He laughed. "Almost got me going, didn't you?" He turned to Kate. "If we do get off of Abatos, go home to your father. I'll be stationed at Breakneck for a while; you may see me as often as you wish, and I'll do my best to help you. And though I foresee some years of martyrdom for you, placed between two fires like Pete and your father, I think you're made of strong stuff."

His eyes twinkling, he added, "Even if you do look fragile and exceedingly beautiful and very huggable and pinchable."

At that moment a deer trotted into the little glade. Rusty red, flecked with white tiny spots edged in black, her large liquid black eyes unafraid, she danced up to them and held out her nose inquiringly towards Kate. She seemed to know that Kate was the only female there.

"Evidently one of those unconditioned to being killed by the beasts of prey," said Carmody. "Come here, my beauty. I do believe that I brought along some sugar for just such an occasion. What shall I call you? Alice? Everybody is mad at this party, but we've no tea."

The girl gave a soft cry of delight and touched the doe's wet black nose. It licked her hand. Pete snorted with disgust.

"You'll be kissing it next."

"Why not?" She put her mouth on its snout.

His face became even redder. Grimacing, he thrust the blade-edge of the saw against the animal's neck, and pressed the trigger. The doe dropped, taking Kate with it, for she had no warning to remove her arms from around its neck. Blood spurted over the saw and Pete's chest and over her arm. The fan-edge of the tool, emitting supersonic waves capable of eating through granite, had sliced a thin plane through the beast's cells.

Masters stared, white-faced now. "I only touched it. I didn't really mean to pull the trigger. I must have nicked its jugular vein. The blood, the blood . . ."

Carmody's face was also pale, and his voice shook.

"Luckily, the doe won't remain dead. But I hope you keep the sight of this blood in your mind the next time you feel anger. It could just as easily be human, you know."

He quit talking to listen. The forest sounds had ceased, overcome by a rush of silence, like the shadow of a cloud. Then, the striding legs and stone eyes of Father.

His voice roared around them as if they were standing beneath a waterfall.

"Anger and death in the air! I feel them when the beasts of prey are hungry. I came quickly, for I knew that these killers were not mine. And I also came for another reason, Carmody, for I have heard from the bishop of your investigations and of your mistaken conclu-

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sions and the decision which you forced upon the captain and the bishop. I came to show you how you have deceived yourself about my powers, to teach you humility towards your superiors."

Masters gave a choked cry, grabbed Kate's hand with his bloodied hand, and began half-running, half-stumbling, dragging her after him. Carmody, though trembling, stood his ground.

"Shut off your sonics. I know how you create awe and panic in my breast."

"You have your device in that bag. Check it. See if there are any radiations from the trees."

Obediently, the man fumbled at the lock of his case, managed after two tries to get it open. He twisted a dial. His eyes grew wide when it had completed its circuit.

"Convinced? There are no sonics at that level, are there? Now — keep one eye on the oscilloscope but the other on me."

Father scooped from the hole of the nearest tree a great handful of the jelly and plastered it over the bloodied area of the doe's neck. "This liquid meat will close up the wound, which is small to begin with, and will rebuild the devastated cells. The jelly sends out probing waves to the surrounding parts of the wound, identifies their structure and hence the structure of the missing or ruptured cells, and begins to fill in. But not unless I direct the procedure. And I can, if necessary, do without the jelly. I do not need it, for my power is good because it comes from God. You should spend ten thousand years with no one to talk to but God. Then you would see that it is impossible for me to do anything but good, that I see to the mystical heart of things, feel its pulse as nearer than that of my body."

He had placed his hand over the glazed eyes. When he withdrew it, the eyes were a liquid shining black again, and the doe's flanks rose and fell. Presently it got on its hooves, thrust a nose towards Father, was repelled by a raised hand, wheeled, and bounded off.

"Perhaps you would like to call for another Question," roared Father. "I understand that new evidence permits it. Had I known that you were filled with such a monkey-like curiosity — and had reasoning powers on a monkey's level — I should have shown you exactly what I am capable of."

The giant strode away. Carmody stared after him. Shaken, he said to himself, "Wrong? Wrong? Have I been lacking in humility, too contemptuous of His Excellency's perceptiveness because he lacked my experience . . . I thought. Have I read too much into his illness, mistaken its foundations?"

He took a deep breath. "Well, if I'm wrong, I will confess it. Publicly, too. But how small this makes me. A pygmy scurrying around the feet of giants, tripping them up in

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an effort to prove myself larger than they."

He began walking. Absently, he reached up to a branch from which hung large apple-like fruit.

"Hmm. Delicious. This world is an easy one to live in. One need not starve nor fear death. One may grow fat and lazy, be at ease in Zion, enjoy the ecstasy of re-creation. That is what you have wanted with one part of your soul, haven't you? God knows you are fat enough, and if you give others the impression of bursting with energy, you often do so with a great effort. You have to ignore your tiredness, appear bristling with eagerness for work. And your parishioners, yes, and your superiors, too, who should know better, take your labor for granted and never pause to wonder if you, too, are tired or discouraged or doubtful. Here there would be no such thing."

Half-eaten, the apple was discarded for red-brown berries from a bush. Frowning, muttering, he ate them, his eyes always on the retreating shoulders and golden-red roach of Father.

"Yet . . . ?"

After a while, he laughed softly. "It is indeed a paradox, John I. Carmody, that you should be considering again the temptation after having talked Tu and André out of it. And it would be an everlasting lesson — one that you are not, I hope, too unintelligent to profit from — if you talked yourself into changing your mind. Perhaps you have needed this because you have not considered how strong was the bishop's temptation, because you felt a measure — oh, only a tinge, but nevertheless a tinge — of contempt for him because he fell so easily and you resisted so easily.

"Hah, you thought you were so strong, you had so many years of experience packed beneath your belt! It was grease and wind that swelled you out, Carmody. You were pregnant with ignorance and pride. And now you must give birth to humiliation. No, humility, for there is a difference between the two, depending on one's attitude. God give you insight for the latter.

"And admit it, Carmody, admit it. Even in the midst of the shock at seeing the deer killed, you felt a joy because you had an excuse to resurrect the animal and to feel again that ecstasy which you know should be forbidden because it *is* a drug and *does* take your mind from the pressing business of your calling. And though you told yourself you weren't going to do it, your voice was feeble, lacking the authority of conviction.

"On the other hand, doesn't God feel ecstasy when He creates, being The Artist? Isn't that part of creating? Shouldn't we feel it, too? But if we do, doesn't that make us think of ourselves as godlike? Still, Father says that *he* knows from whence *he* derives *his* powers. And if *he* acts aloof, *noli me tangere*, *he* could be

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excused by reason of ten thousand years of solitude. God knows, some of the saints were eccentric enough to have been martyred by the very Church that later canonized them.

"But it's a drug, this resurrection business. If it is, you are correct, the bishop is wrong. Still, alcohol, food, the reading of books, and many other things may become drugs. The craving for them can be controlled, they may be used temperately. Why not the resurrection, once one has gotten over the first flush of intoxication? Why not, indeed?"

He threw away the berries and tore off a fruit that looked like a banana with a light brown shell instead of soft peelings.

"Hmm. *He* keeps an excellent cuisine. Tastes like roast beef with gravy and a soupçon of onions. Loaded with protein, I'll bet. No wonder Father may be so massively, even shockingly, male, so virile-looking, yet a strict vegetarian.

"Ah, you talk too much to yourself. A bad habit you picked up on Dante's Joy and never got rid of, even after *that* night when you were converted. That was a terrible time, Carmody, and only by the grace . . . Well, why don't you shut up, Carmody?"

Suddenly, he dropped behind a bush. Father had come to a large hill which rose from the forest and was bare of trees except for a single giant crowning it. The huge O at the base of its trunk showed its nature, but where the others of its kind were brown-trunked and light-green-leaved, this had a shiny white bark and foliage of so dark a green that it looked black. Around its monstrous white roots, which swelled above the ground, was a crowd of animals. Lionesses, leopardesses, bitch wolves, struthiursines, a huge black cow, a rhino, a scarlet-faced gorilla, a cow-elephant, a moa-like bird capable of gutting an elephant with its beak, a man-sized crested green lizard, and many others. All massed together, moving restlessly but ignoring each other, silent.

When they saw Father, they gave a concerted, muted roar, a belly-deep rumble. Moving aside for him, they formed an aisle through which he walked.

Carmody gasped. What he had mistaken for the exposed white roots of the tree were piles of bones, a tumulus of skeletons.

Father halted before them, turned, addressed the beasts in a chanting rhythm in an unknown tongue, gestured, describing large and small wheels that interwove. Then he stooped and began picking up the skulls one by one, kissing them on their grinning teeth, replacing them tenderly. All this while the beasts crouched silently and motionless, as if they understood what he was saying and doing. Perhaps, in a way, they did, for through them, like wind rippling fur, ran a current of anticipation.

The padre, straining his eyes,

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muttered, "Humanoid skulls. *His* size, too. Did *he* come here with them, and they died? Or did *he* murder them? If so, why the ceremony of loving, the caresses?"

Father put down the last grisly article, lifted his hands upwards and out in a sign that took in the skies, then brought them in so they touched his shoulders.

"*He's* come from the heavens? Or *he* means he identifies *himself* with the sky, the whole universe, perhaps? Pantheism? Or what?"

Father shouted so loudly that Carmody almost jumped up from behind the bush and revealed himself. The beasts growled an antiphony. The priest balled his fists and raised his head, glaring fiercely. He seemed to be gripped with anger. He looked like a beast of prey, so much did his snarling face resemble the assembled animals'. They, too, had been seized with fury. The big cats yowled. The pachyderms trumpeted. The cow and bears bellowed. The gorilla beat her chest. The lizard hissed like a steam engine.

Again Father shouted. The spell that held them in restraint was shattered. En masse, the pack hurled itself upon the giant. Without resistance, he went down beneath the heaving sea of hairy backs. Once, a hand was thrust above the screaming mêlée, making a circular motion as if it were still carrying out the prescribed movements of a ritual. Then it was engulfed in a lioness' mouth, and the spurting stump fell back.

Carmody had been groveling in the dirt, his fingers hooked into the grass, obviously restraining himself from leaping up to join the slaughter. At the moment he saw Father's hand torn off, he did rise, but his facial expression was different. Fright showed on it, and horror. He ran off into the woods, doubled over so the bush would conceal him from the chance gaze of the animals. Once, he stopped behind a tree, vomited, then raced off again.

Behind him rose the thunder of the blood-crazed killers.

VII

The enormous melon-striped moon rose shortly after nightfall. Its bright rays glimmered on the hemisphere of the *Gull* and on the white faces gathered at the meadow's edge. Father John walked out of the forest's darkness. He stopped and called out, "What is the matter?"

Tu disengaged himself from the huddled group. He pointed at the open main port of the ship, from which light streamed.

Father John gasped, "*Him?* Already?"

The majestic figure stood motionless at the foot of the portable steps, waiting as if he could stand there patiently for another ten thousand years.

Tu's voice, though angry, was edged with doubt.

"The bishop has betrayed us! He's

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told *him* of the law that we must accept *him* and has given *him* passage money!"

"And what are you going to do about it?" said Carmody, his gravelly voice even rougher than usual.

"Do? What else can I do but take *him* on? Regulations require it. If I refuse — why, why, I'd lose my captaincy. You know that. The most I can do is put off leaving until dawn. The bishop may have changed his mind by then."

"Where is His Excellency?"

"Don't Excellency that traitor. He's gone off into the woods and become another Father."

"We must find him and save him from himself!" cried Carmody.

"I'll go with you," said Tu. "I'd let him go his own way to hell, except that the enemies of our Church would mock us. My God, a bishop, too!"

Within a few minutes, the two men, armed with flashlights, ship-finders and sonobeams, walked into the forest. Tu also wore a pistol. They went alone because the padre did not want to expose his bishop to the embarrassment that would be his if confronted by a crowd of angry men. Moreover, he thought they'd have a better chance of talking him back into his senses if just his old friends were there.

"Where in hell could we find him?" groaned the captain. "God, it's dark in here. And look at those eyes. There must be thousands."

"The beasts know something extraordinary is up. Listen, the whole forest's awake."

"Celebrating a change of reign. The King is dead; long live the King. Where could he be?"

"Probably the lake. That's the place he loved best."

"Why didn't you say so? We could have been there in two minutes in a copter."

"There'll be no using the copter tonight."

Father John flashed his light on the ship-finder. "Look how the needle's whirling. I'll bet our wrist radios are dead."

"Hello, *Gull, Gull*, come in, come in. . . . You're right. It's out. Christ, those eyes glowing, the trees are crawling with them. Our sonos are kaput too. Why don't our flashes go out?"

"I imagine because *he* knows that they enable *his* beasts to locate us more quickly. Try your automatic. Its mechanism is electrically powered, isn't it?"

Tu groaned again. "Doesn't work. Oh, for the old type!"

"It's not too late for you to turn back," said Carmody. "We may not get out of the woods alive if we do locate the bishop."

"What's the matter with you? Do you think I'm a coward? I allow no man, priest or not, to call me that."

"Not at all. But your primary duty is to the ship, you know."

"And to my passengers. Let's go."

"I thought I was wrong. I almost changed my mind about Father,"

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said the priest. "Perhaps *he* was using his powers, which didn't depend entirely on material sources, for good. But I wasn't sure. So I followed *him*, and then, when I witnessed *his* death, I knew I'd been right, that evil would come from any attempted use of *him*."

"*His* death? But *he* was at the *Gull* a moment ago."

Carmody hurriedly told Tu what he'd seen.

"But, but . . . I don't understand. Father can't stand the touch of *his* own creatures, and *he* exercises perfect control over them. Why the mutiny? How could *he* have come back to life so quickly, especially if *he* were torn to pieces? Say, maybe there's more than one Father, twins, and *he's* playing tricks on us. Maybe *he* just has control over a few animals. *He's* a glorified lion-tamer, and *he* uses his trained beasts when *he's* around us. And *he* ran into a group he couldn't handle."

"You are half-right. First, it was a mutiny, but one that *he* drove them into, a ritual mutiny. I felt *his* mental command; it almost made me jump in and tear *him* apart, too. Second, I imagine *he* came back to life so quickly because the white tree is an especially powerful and swiftly acting one. Third, *he* is playing tricks on us, but not the kind you suggest."

Carmody, slowing his pace, puffed and panted. "I'm paying for my sins now. God help me, I'm going on a diet. I'll exercise, too, when this affair is over. I loathe my fat carcass. But what about when I'm seated hungry at a table piled high with the too-good things of life, created in the beginning to be enjoyed? What then?"

"I could tell you what then, but we've no time for talk like that. Stick to the point," Tu growled. His contempt for self-indulgers was famous.

"Very well. As I said, it was obviously a ritual of self-sacrifice. It was that knowledge which sent me scurrying off in an unsuccessful search for the bishop. I meant to tell him that Father was only half-lying when *he* said *he* derived *his* powers from God and that *he* worshiped God.

"*He* does. But the god is *himself!* In *his* vast egoism he resembles the old pagan deities of Earth, who were supposed to have slain themselves and then, having made the supreme sacrifice, resurrected themselves. Odin, for instance, who hung himself from a tree."

"But he wouldn't have heard of them. Why would he imitate them?"

"He doesn't have to have heard of our Earth myths. After all, there are certain religious rites and symbols that are universal, that sprang up spontaneously on a hundred different planets. Sacrifice to a god, communion by eating the god, sowing and reaping ceremonies, the concept of being a chosen people, the symbols of the circle and the

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cross. So Father may have brought the idea from *his* home world. Or *he* may have thought it up as the highest possible act *he* was capable of. Man must have a religion, even if it consists of worshipping himself.

"Also, don't forget that *his* ritual, like most, combined religion with practicality. *He's* ten millennia old and has preserved *his* longevity by going from time to time into the jelly tree. *He* thought *he'd* be going with us, that it'd be some time before *he* could grow a tree on an alien world. A rejuvenation treatment is part of the re-creation, you know. The calcium deposit in your vascular system, the fatty deposits in your brain cells, the other degenerations that make you old, are left out of the process. You emerge fresh and young from the tree."

"The skulls?"

"The entire skeleton isn't necessary for the re-creation, though it's the custom to put it in. A sliver of bone is enough, for a single cell contains the genetic pattern. You see, I'd overlooked something. That was the problem of how certain animals may be conditioned into being killed by the carnivores. If their flesh is rebuilt around the bones according to the genetic record alone, then the animal should be without memory of its previous life. Hence, its nervous system would contain no conditioned reflexes. But it does. Therefore, the jelly must also reproduce the contents of the neural system. How? I surmise that at the very moment of dying the nearest jelly-deposit records the total wave output of the cells, including the complex of waves radiated by the 'knotted' molecules of the memory. Then it reproduces it.

"So, Father's skulls are left outside, and when *he* rises, *he* is greeted with their sight, a most refreshing vision to *him*. Remember, *he* kissed them during the sacrifice. *He* showed his love for *himself*. Life kissing death, knowing *he* had conquered death."

"Ugh!"

"Yes, and that is what will happen to the Galaxy if Father leaves here. Anarchy, a bloody battle until only one person is left to each planet, stagnation, the end of sentient life as we know, no goal . . . Look, there's the lake ahead!"

Carmody halted behind a tree. André was standing by the shore, his back turned to them. His head was bent forward as if in prayer or meditation. Or perhaps grief.

"Your Excellency," said the padre softly, stepping out from behind the tree.

André started. His hands, which must have been placed together on his chest, flew out to either side. But he did not turn. He sucked in a deep breath, bent his knees, and dived into the lake.

Carmody yelled, "No!" and launched himself in a long flat dive. Tu was not long behind him but stopped short of the edge. He crouched there while the little waves

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caused by the disappearance of the two spread, then subsided into little rings, moonlight haloed on a dark flat mirror. He removed his coat and shoes but still did not leap in. At that moment a head broke the surface and a loud whoosh sounded as the man took in a deep breath.

Tu called, "Carmody? Bishop?"

The other sank again. Tu jumped in, disappeared. A minute passed. Then three heads emerged simultaneously. Presently, the captain and the little priest stood gasping above the limp form of André.

"Fought me," said Carmody hoarsely, his chest rising and falling quickly. "Tried push me off. So . . . put my thumbs behind his ears . . . where jaw meets . . . squeezed . . . went limp but don't know if he'd breathed water . . . or I'd made him unconscious . . . or both . . . no time talk now . . ."

The priest turned the bishop over so he was face downward, turned the head to one side, and straddled the back on his knees. Palms placed outwards on the other's shoulders, he began the rhythmic pumping he hoped would push the water out and the breath in.

"How could he do it?" said Tu. "How could he, born and raised in the faith, a consecrated and respected bishop, betray us? Who'd have thought it? Look what he did for the Church on Lazy Fair; he was a great man. And how could he, knowing all it meant, try to kill himself?"

"Shut your damn mouth," replied Carmody, harshly. "Were *you* exposed to *his* temptations? What do you know of his agonies? Quit judging him. Make yourself useful. Give me a count by your watch so I can adjust my pumpings. Here we go. One . . . two . . . three . . ."

Fifteen minutes later, the bishop was able to sit up and hold his head between his hands. Tu had walked off a little distance and stood there, back turned to them. Carmody knelt down and said, "Do you think you can walk now, Your Excellency? We ought to get out of this forest as quickly as possible. I feel danger in the air."

"There's more than just danger. There's damnation," said André feebly.

He rose, almost fell, was caught by the other's strong hand.

"Thank you. Let's go. Ah, old friend, why didn't you let me sink to the bottom and die where *he* would not have found my bones and no man would have known of my disgrace?"

"It's never too late, Your Excellency. The fact that you regretted your bargain and were driven by remorse . . ."

"Let's hurry back before it does become too late. Ah, I feel the spark of another life being born. You know how it is, John. It glows and grows and flares until it fills your whole body and you're about to burst with fire and light. This one is

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powerful. It must be in a nearby tree. Hold me, John. If I go into another seizure, drag me away, no matter how I fight.

"You have felt what I did, you seem to be strong enough to fight against it, but I have fought against something like it all my life and never revealed it to anyone, even denied it in my prayers — the worst thing I could do — until the too-long-punished body took over and expressed itself in my illness. Now I fear that . . . Hurry, hurry!"

Tu grabbed André's elbow and helped Carmody propel him onwards through the darkness, lit only by the priest's beam. Overhead was a solid roof of interlacing branches.

Something coughed. They stopped, frozen.

"Father?" whispered Tu.

"No. His representative, I fear."

Twenty yards away, barring their path, crouched a leopardess, spotted and tufted, five hundred pounds ready to spring. Its green eyes blinked, narrowing in the beam; its round ears were cocked forward. Abruptly, it rose and stalked slowly towards them. It moved with a comic mixture of feline grace and overstuffed waddle. At another time they might have chuckled at this creature with its fat sheathing its spring-steel muscles and its sagging swollen belly. Not now, for it could — and probably would — tear them to bits.

Abruptly, the tail, which had been moving gently back and forth, stiffened out. It roared once, then sprang at Father John, who had stepped out in front of Tu and André.

Father John yelled. His flashlight sailed through the air and into the brush. The big cat yowled and bounded off. There were two sounds: a large body crashing through the bushes and Father John cursing heartily, not with intended blasphemy but for the sake of an intense relief.

"What happened?" said Tu. "And what are you doing there, down on your knees?"

"I'm not praying. I'll save that for later. This perilous flashlight went out, and I can't find it. Get down here and help me and be useful. Get your hands dirty for once; we're not on your perilous vessel, you know."

"What happened?"

"Like a cornered rat," groaned Carmody, "I fought. Out of sheer desperation I struck with my fist and accidentally hit it on its nose. I couldn't have done better if I'd planned it. These beasts of prey are fat and lazy and cowardly after ten thousand years of easy living on conditioned victims. They have no real guts. Resistance scares them. This one would not have attacked if it hadn't been urged by Father, I'm sure. Isn't that so, Your Excellency?"

"Yes. *He* showed me how to control any animal on Abatos anywhere. I'm not advanced enough as

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yet to recognize the individual when she's out of sight and transmit mental commands, but I can do so at close range."

"Ah, I've found this doubly perilous flashlight."

Carmody turned the beam on and rose. "Then I was wrong in thinking my puny fist had driven off that monster? You instilled panic in it?"

"No. I canceled out Father's wavelengths and left the cat on its own. Too late, of course — once it had begun an attack, its instinct would urge it on. We owe its flight to your courage."

"If my heart would stop hammering so hard, I'd believe more in my courage. Well, let's go. Does Your Excellency feel stronger?"

"I'll keep up with any pace you set. And don't use the title. My action in defying the Question Council's decision constituted an automatic resignation. You know that."

"I know only what Tu has told me Father told him."

They walked on. Occasionally, Carmody flashed his light behind him. While doing this he became aware that the leopardess or one of its sisters was following them by some forty yards.

"We are not alone," he said. André said nothing, and Tu, misunderstanding him, began to pray in a very low voice. Carmody did not elucidate but urged them to walk faster.

Suddenly, the shadow of the forest fell away before the brightness of the moon. There was still a crowd on the meadow, but it was away from the edge, gathered beneath the curve of the ship. Father was not in sight.

"Where is *he?*" called Father John. An echo answered from the meadow's other side, followed at once by the giant's appearance in the main port. Stooping, Father walked through it and down the steps to the ground, there to resume his motionless vigilance.

André muttered, "Give me strength."

Carmody spoke to the captain. "You must make a choice. Do what your faith and intelligence tell you is best. Or obey the regulations of Saxwell and the Commonwealth. Which is it to be?"

Tu was rigid and silent, cast into thought like bronze. Without waiting for a reply, Carmody started to walk towards the ship. Halfway across the meadow, he stopped and raised clenched fists and cried, "No use trying that panic trick on us, Father! Knowing what *you* are doing, and how, we may fight against it, for we are men!"

His words were lost to the people around the ship. They were yelling at each other and scrambling for a place on the steps so they could get inside. Father must have evoked a battery of waves from the surrounding trees, more powerful than anything used before. It struck like a

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tidal wave, carrying all before it. All except Carmody and André. Even Tu broke and ran for the *Gull*.

"John," moaned the bishop. "I'm sorry. But I can't stand it. Not the subsonics. No. The betrayal. The recognition of what I've been fighting against since manhood. It's not true that when you first see the face of your unknown enemy you have the battle half-won. I can't stand it. The need I have for this damnable communion . . . I'm sorry, believe me. But I must . . ."

He whirled and ran back into the forest. Carmody chased after him, shouting, but his short legs were quickly outdistanced. Ahead of him, out of the darkness, came a coughing roar. A scream. Silence.

Unhesitatingly, the priest plunged on, his light stabbing before him. When he saw the cat crouching over the crumpled form, one gray-furred paw tearing at its victim's groin, he shouted again and charged. Snarling, the leopardess arched its back, seemed ready to rear on its hind legs and bat at the man with its bloodied claws, then roared, turned, and bounded away.

It was too late. There'd be no bringing back of the bishop this time. Not unless . . .

Carmody shuddered and lifted the sagging weight in his arms and staggered back across the meadow. He was met by Father.

"Give me the body," thundered the voice.

"No! You'll not put him in your tree. I'm taking him back to the ship. After we get home, we'll give him a decent burial. And you might as well quit broadcasting your panic. I'm angry, not scared. And we're leaving in spite of you, and we're not taking you. So do your damnedest!"

Father's voice became softer. It sounded sad and puzzled.

"You do not understand, man. I went aboard your vessel and into the bishop's cabin and tried to sit down in a chair that was too small for me. I had to sit on the cold and hard floor, and while I waited I thought of going out into vast and empty space again and to all the many strange and uncomfortable and sickeningly undeveloped worlds. It seemed to me that the walls were getting too close and were collapsing in upon me. They would crush me. Suddenly, I knew I could not endure their nearness for any time at all, and that, though our trip would be short, I'd soon be in other too-small rooms. And there would be many of the pygmies swarming about me, crushing each other and possibly me in an effort to gape at me, to touch me. There would be millions of them, each trying to get his dirty little hairy paws on me. And I thought of the planets crawling with unclean females ready to drop their litters at a moment's notice and all the attendant uncleanlinesses. And the males mad with lust to get them with child. And the ugly cities stink-

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ing with refuse. And the deserts that scab those neglected worlds, the disorder, the chaos, the uncertainty. I had to step out for a moment to breathe again the clean and certain air of Abatos. It was then that the bishop appeared."

"You were terrified by the thought of change. I would pity you, except for what you have done to him," said Carmody, nodding down at the form in his arms.

"I do not want your pity. After all, I am Father. You are a man who will crumble into the dust forever. But do not blame me. He is dead because of what he was, not because of me. Ask his real father why he did not give him love along with his blows and why he shamed him without justifying why he should be shamed and why he taught him to forgive others but not himself.

"Enough of this. Give me him. I liked him, could almost stand his touch. I will raise him to be my companion. Even I want someone to talk to who can understand me."

"Out of the way," demanded Carmody. "André made his choice. He trusted me to take care of him, I know. I loved the man, though I did not always approve of what he did or was. He was a great man, even with his weakness. None of us can say anything against him. Out of the way, before I commit the violence which you say you so dread but which does not keep you from sending wild beasts to bring about your will. Out of the way!"

"You do not understand," murmured the giant, one hand pulling hard upon his beard. The black, silver-splintered eyes stared hard, but he did not lift his hand against Carmody. Within a minute, the priest had carried his burden into the *Gull*. The port shut softly, but decisively, behind him.

Some time later, Captain Tu, having disposed of his major duties in translating the ship, entered the bishop's cabin. Carmody was there, kneeling by the side of the bed that held the corpse.

"I was late because I had to take Mrs. Recka's bottle away from her and lock her up for a while," he explained. He paused, then, "Please don't think I'm hateful. But right is right. The bishop killed himself and doesn't deserve burial in consecrated ground."

"How do you know?" replied Carmody, his head still bent, his lips scarcely moving.

"No disrespect to the dead, but the bishop had power to control the beasts, so he must have ordered the cat to kill him. It was suicide."

"You forget that the panic waves which Father caused in order to get you and me quickly into the ship also affected any animals in the area. The leopardess may have killed the bishop just because he got in the way of her flight. How are we to know any different?

"Also, Tu, don't forget this. The bishop may be a martyr. He knew

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that the one thing that would force Father to stay on Abatos would be for himself to die. Father would not be able to endure the idea of leaving *his* planet fatherless. André was the only one among us that could take over the position Father had vacated. He was ignorant at that time, of course, that Father had changed his mind because of his sudden claustrophobia.

All the bishop could know was that his death would chain Father to Abatos and free us. And if he deliberately slew himself by means of the leopardess, does that make him any less a martyr? Women have chosen death rather than dishonor and been canonized.

"We shall never know the bishop's true motive. We'll leave knowledge of that to Another.

"As for the owner of Abatos, my feeling against *him* was right. Nothing *he* said was true, and *he* was as much a coward as any of *his* fat and lazy beasts. *He* was no god. *He* was the Father . . . of Lies."

Silent, upon two peaks . .

In the Foreign Press Club masked ball at Rome's historic Mattoi Palace, actress Gina Lollobrigida won an award as "Space Girl of 1954." — Associated Press, February 22, 1955.

As everyone gets in the act
To seize tomorrow for today's publicity,
What other spacemaid is, with such felicity,
So round, so firm, so fully packed?

Space, which once seemed a vacuum-hollow,
Has now been plumply filled by Lollo.
Than any man-made vacuum frigider,
It now may glow with warmth from Brigida.

At such a choice all BEMs rejoice;
Come, fellow BEMs, and carol with full voice:
Where a new planet swims within our ken,
We bear the symbol of Breast-Eager Men.

HERMAN W. MUDGETT

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It would be presumptuous even to attempt to introduce the peerless Ogden Nash. Let me say only that America's favorite verse-satirist here reveals, in a poem never before published anywhere, surprising new facets of his art, and displays an unexpectedly aucte knowledge of true murder in a horror-ballad suggesting nothing so much as a twentieth century companion piece to Thomas Hood's nightmare, The Dream of Eugene Aram.

A Tale of the Thirteenth Floor

by OGDEN NASH

The hands of the clock were reaching high
In an old midtown hotel;
I name no name, but its sordid fame
Is table talk in Hell.
I name no name, but Hell's own flame
Illumes the lobby garish,
A gilded snare just off Times Square
For the virgins of the parish.

The revolving door swept the grimy floor
Like a crinoline grotesque,
And a lowly bum from an ancient slum
Crept furtively past the desk.
His footsteps sift into the lift
As a knife in the sheath is slipped,
Stealthy and swift into the lift
As a vampire into a crypt.

Old Maxie, the elevator boy,
Was reading an ode by Shelley,
But he dropped the ode as it were a toad
When the gun jammed into his belly.
There came a whisper as soft as mud
In the bed of an old canal:
"Take me up to the suite of Pinball Pete,
The rat who betrayed my gal."

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The lift doth rise with groans and sighs
Like a duchess for the waltz,
Then in middle shaft, like a duchess daft,
It changes its mind and halts.
The bum bites lip as the landlocked ship
Doth neither fall nor rise,
But Maxie the elevator boy
Regards him with burning eyes.
"First to explore the thirteenth floor,"
Says Maxie, "would be wise."

Quoth the bum, "There is moss on your double cross,
I have been this way before,
I have cased the joint at every point,
And there is no thirteenth floor.
The architect he skipped direct
From twelve unto fourteen,
There is twelve below and fourteen above,
And nothing in between,
For the vermin who dwell in this hotel
Could never abide thirteen."

Said Max, "Thirteen, that floor obscene,
Is hidden from human sight;
But once a year it doth appear,
On this Walpurgis night.
Ere you peril your soul in murderer's role,
Heed those who sinned of yore;
The path they trod led away from God,
And onto the thirteenth floor,
Where those they slew, a grisly crew,
Reproach them forevermore.

"We are higher than twelve and below fourteen,"
Said Maxie to the bum,
"And the sickening draft that taints the shaft
Is a whiff of kingdom come.
The sickening draft that taints the shaft
Blows through the devil's door!"
And he squashed the latch like a fungus patch,
And revealed the thirteenth floor.

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It was cheap cigars like lurid scars
That glowed in the rancid gloom,
The murk was a-boil with fusel oil
And the reek of stale perfume.
And round and round there dragged and wound
A loathsome conga chain,
The square and the hep in slow lock step,
The slayer and the slain.
(For the souls of the victims ascend on high,
But their bodies below remain.)

The clean souls fly to their home in the sky,
But their bodies remain below
To pursue the Cains who emptied their veins
And harry them to and fro.
When life is extinct each corpse is linked
To its gibbering murderer,
As a chicken is bound with wire around
The neck of a killer cur.

Handcuffed to Hate come Doctor Waite
(*He* tastes the poison now),
And Ruth and Judd and a head of blood
With horns upon its brow.
Up sashays Nan with her feathery fan
From *Floradora* bright;
She never hung for Caesar Young,
But she's dancing with him tonight.

Here's the bulging hip and the foam-flecked lip
Of the mad dog, Vincent Coll,
And over there that ill-met pair,
Becker and Rosenthal.
Here's Legs and Dutch and a dozen such
Of braggart bullies and brutes,
And each one bends 'neath the weight of friends
Who are wearing concrete suits.

Now the damned make way for the double damned
Who emerge with shuffling pace
From the nightmare zone of persons unknown,

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With neither name nor face.
And poor Dot King to one doth cling,
Joined in a ghastly jig,
While Elwell doth jape at a goblin shape
And tickle it with his wig.

See Rothstein pass like breath on a glass,
The original Black Sox kid;
He riffles the pack, riding piggyback
On the killer whose name he hid.
And smeared like brine on a slavering swine,
Starr Faithful, once so fair,
Drawn from the sea to her debauchee,
With the salt sand in her hair.

And still they come, and from the bum
The icy sweat doth spray;
His white lips scream as in a dream,
"For God's sake, let's away!
If ever I meet with Pinball Pete
I will not seek his gore,
Lest a treadmill grim I must trudge with him
On the hideous thirteenth floor."

"For you I rejoice," said Maxie's voice,
"And I bid you go in peace,
But I am late for a dancing date
That nevermore will cease.
So remember, friend, as your way you wend,
That it would have happened to you,
But *I* turned the heat on Pinball Pete;
You see — *I* had a daughter, too!"

The bum reached out and he tried to shout,
But the door in his face was slammed,
And silent as stone he rode down alone
From the floor of the double damned.

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Every reader, I trust, knows G. B. Stern's novels of the fascinating Rakonitz family and her delightfully rambling memoirs of her own even more fascinating family and friends. But her skilful short stories are too little known, and hardly anyone — not even such a scholar as Everett F. Bleiler in his CHECKLIST OF FANTASTIC LITERATURE — *seems aware that she has written fantasies. Best of them, to my taste, is this tantalizing story of glowingly lovely twin sisters, rhapsodic gypsy music . . . and the strange powers of a bottle of Slivovitz.*

Gemini

by G. B. STERN

LOOK HERE . . . WHAT HAS become of David Merriman?"

They had asked this so often; but just tonight it seemed a good thing to go and find out. For they missed Merriman. They missed his vitality and his good humour, and his preposterous habit of rushing away on by-issues, whatever subject was in discussion, like a river in full spate, and having to be dammed and dammed for it!

Up till six weeks ago, Merriman was accessible whenever they wanted him, any or all of them; but lately, queer rumours were about; for he had not disappeared, after the fashion of Waring and other mysterious victims of the Wanderlust —

"What's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip?" . . .

— Corporeally, he was still present in London, in his rooms; except for one month when he had impulsively quitted them without leaving a clue as to his whereabouts. It was socially that he had given his comrades the slip. And then, these puzzling reports: "They say he's chucked his job on the *Gazette*. They say he's turned analytical chemist . . . something of that sort; they say he's hunting for the elixir of youth — as though Vardaroff hadn't already obligingly found it for us; they say he potters about all day and most of the night in his dressing-gown, with a jungle of beard on his face, pouring things out of bottles; they say he smashes the bottles and that his rooms are a heap of broken glass; they say he won't see anyone, that he's looking . . . Oh they say, they say, and they say . . ."

"Come on. I'm sick of this. Let's

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go and rout him out; make him dress and shave and spend the evening with us, like a human being."

So Prentice fetched his car from the garage, and they went off in search of David Merriman.

His three friends were anxious about him, in spite of their assumption that all they missed was his rollicking good company. The fourth man did not care. He was a new acquaintance brought in casually that night by Johnny Carfax; younger than the others, better dressed and better looking; a handsome youngster with an air of secret adventure, and not too scrupulous adventure at that! — You could imagine his wearing a coat slung round his shoulders without putting his arms into the sleeves — that type of man! A man of easy conquest. He seemed amused at all this fuss about David Merriman. A sneer hung on his lips:

"If the poor beggar wants to be left alone to smash medicine bottles . . ." For he was reluctant to be hauled out of Prentice's comfortable chambers, having once been brought there. It was a blowy night, and the whisky was good, and what did Merriman matter, anyway?

"Why not ring up?" he suggested.

But the others took no notice. He was the youngest, and a stranger — a rather impudent stranger — and they did not want strangers; they wanted Merriman back again. Johnny Carfax wondered why he had bothered at all with young Theo Strake?

What *was* the matter with David?

His rooms were in the City; a deserted city that night; all the empty streets were full of wind, instead of the usual hustle and crowd. Merriman's rooms were at the top of the house. They banged and banged at the door, and nobody answered. Then suddenly came a crash — and a sombre trickle under the door. It was too melodramatic to be true; and Theo Strake laughed at the white faces of his companions.

"*That's* not blood," he said, in scoffing reassurance. "I've seen a lot of blood. Smell it if you doubt me. It's — yes, vermouth; Cinzano."

. . . But Prentice had lost his head, and was pounding at the panels of the door as though he hoped to smash them. Then suddenly the door flew open, and there stood Merriman, looking like a conventional illustration of the weird stories they had heard about him; looking like Lucifer fallen from Heaven with a whack. He was unshaven, and wore his dressing-gown and slippers. But his aspect was hollow and hunted and wild, beyond these mere externals. Nor did he seem as pleased at the sight of his visitors as might have been expected from a man of such wontedly genial temperament.

"Do you want to come in?" he asked, abruptly.

"Don't be a fool, Merriman!" cried Carfax impatiently. "Do you suppose we want to stop outside and shout through the door? If you've

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got something to hide, sling it in the cupboard, quick: him or her or it. We'll give you fifty seconds' grace."

Merriman shrugged his shoulders. "I've got something to find; nothing to hide."

"Missing Will?"

He grinned impishly, more like the David they were familiar with. "Missing cocktail . . ." he said. "Come in, come in! I'm not so sure that I'm sorry to see you. This room is mouldy with enigmas, and I'm sick of groping. If you wanted to get to Hungary, Johnny, how would you do it? Would you go to the station and take a ticket? Would you go by train and boat and train again? Would you? Well, that's just what I can't do, you see. Oh, the splendid insolent simplicity of going to the station and taking a ticket. And here I am — stuck! I tell you, it's driving me mad!"

Mad? . . . The unswept floor of the room was piled high with bottles; so were the tables, chairs and shelves. Glasses and broken glasses were littered everywhere; and glasses half-full of pale liquids, colourless or faintly gold, dimly green, deep winking evil red. David Merriman, standing in the midst of this fantastic wreckage, this confusion of alchemy, standing there, a despairing djinn in a dressing-gown, brandishing his arms and shouting: "Open Sesame! — Blast you! Open!" to an invisible box-office that was to take him to Hungary, and left him in the City of London . . . What did it all mean? It was quite incredible, and quite incredibly idiotic.

— "You'd better tell us about it, David," Carfax suggested, gently. He and Prentice and Richardson were rather wishing that the new fellow were not looking on at this spectacle of a disintegrated Merriman.

"Look here," Richardson pointed out, for his spirit was the most laborious in the group; "Look here, you know, Merriman, if you want to go to Hungary — and it beats me why anyone should! — If you want to go . . . Look here, why the devil don't you let Cook or Lunn or one of those fellows fix you up? I suppose you're after a woman over there? — dark and gypsyish, aren't they? Not my type. . . . But sitting about, and turning down your friends, and drinking too much, won't take you far."

Their host burst into a shout of laughter: "Won't take me far!" he cried. . . . And his arms involuntarily described a series of motions familiar to all of them: the flamboyant rhythm of cocktail shaking . . . in the air and without implements. So that Carfax shuddered at the grotesque spectacle; and he crunched a way over to the window, bits of glass snapping under his feet; there at any rate he could look out; need not watch the spectral pantomime by the ghost of a once sane and witty Merriman.

— "Won't take me *far*? But I tell

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you, it'll take me farther, when I succeed, *if* I succeed, than all your Cooks and your Lunns and your wagon-lits! It'll take me as far as I want to go: As far as Heaven and Hungary . . . And, oh, Horace, you chump, do you really suppose I'm drinking too much just for the sake of getting drunk?" Suddenly, he seemed to perceive that Carfax, whom he had always liked best of the three, was definitely unhappy about him. "All right, Johnny, all right, all right — I'll tell you. Then you can judge. Horace won't believe a word of what I say, and it'll be good fun watching Horace not believing me — best fun I've had for weeks. I'm not sure that I believe myself. . . .

"You know, in the summer, I was rambling about Central Europe? I stuck to the smaller places; didn't go near Prague or Budapest or any of the capitals; hadn't got the clothes, for one thing. At a village in the Carpathians, St. Rudigund, the host of the pub asked me to try some home-grown Slivovitz; not his own vintage; his father's. It was pretty old, he said. He only had a few bottles left. It was unusual stuff, not too sweet, with a haunting flavour of plum running through it. I wanted a bottle to take home with me. In fact, it was to be a little present for Horace. . . . Say thank you, Horace, even though you never got it! The old fellow made me pay such a thumping price that I decided not to give it to Horace.

"When I got home — do you remember that night when I gave a dinner, and wasn't there?"

Prentice nodded. He had been one of the guests. And that had been the beginning of Merriman's oddness; the beginning of eccentric rumour . . .

"I was going to mix the cocktails and have 'em ready, just before any of you turned up, when it struck me that I might invent a new one with a strain of Slivovitz in it. So I opened the bottle, and shook up one glassful, for myself, just to try it; it was by way of an experiment. I didn't put in more than a dash of the Slivovitz. . . .

". . . And there I was, drinking it at a table in a cabaret in some foreign town. There were gypsies playing, the real Tzigany; and I thought at once that it might be Hungary; Budapest, probably. I recognised the sort of naked piano instrument they have, striking at the bars with two little balled sticks.

"No, *no*, it wasn't a magic carpet or any obvious damfool wizardy like that. I didn't fall asleep and dream, or fly through the air. I was just *there* — there and not here. It's simple enough. You believe a lot of more absurd things every day of your life, Horace, only you're used to them. You simply wouldn't *believe* the things that you believe!

"There I was, and not at all surprised. It was one of those pleasantly irresponsible cafés where you couldn't take your sister, and

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wouldn't if you could. Lewd and expensive and picturesque. Well patronised, too.

"Gypsy music slithers about the room like shining water; you can't gather it up, or remember it afterwards, but at the time, by God, it does make you feel a glorious beast! I told you that there were no women there, didn't I? The name of the café was Kiss Ludo. I saw it upside down over the entrance. Not a joke. Kisses are common in Hungary — Kiss Ludo; the surname first. Presently, they brought in three enormous trays with huge silver dish-covers over them; everybody applauded when the covers were whisked off — three girls lying thigh-deep in flowers! *You'd* have applauded, Horace —" But Merriman glared at Theo Strake, as though he had only just perceived that here was an intruder; and disliked him fiercely on sight. "Yes, the usual Continental cabaret surprise. But really pretty girls. One of them —" he dropped his voice. . . . And again his hands described the mechanical motion of shaking a cocktail, as though they had done it for so long that now they acted without his volition — "One of them was lovely. She reminded me of the Kirschners we used to tack up on the walls of our huts at the beginning of the War, do you remember? Swift and young and roguish. Delectable . . . ! Fair bobbed hair, very round and shining, like a golden apple. She leaped off her tray, scattering flowers, and ran, light-footed, straight to me; yes, straight over to my table, and knelt on the chair beside me. My word, I was flattered!

"She spoke a little French, about as much as I did. Waiting till the room was full of noise and music, she murmured:

" 'Take me back. I am frightened. I like you, I love you, but I am frightened.'

" 'Take you back where?' I asked.

"I was thunderstruck when she answered: 'Back to school!'

"School, she said, was about thirty miles out of Budapest, on the plain. She couldn't quite explain to me — her French was too limited, or mine was! — how she came to be on the tray and under the dishcover in the Café of Kiss Ludo. It didn't seem to me a normal position for any pupil at a Young Ladies' Seminary; but I gathered that it was a joke; that she had wanted to see life; that she was bored at school; and that she had changed places with one Marishka, whose name occurred several times in the story; that now she had had enough of the joke, and please would I take her back? 'I like you, I love you, I am frightened' — this was her refrain. I wondered how she would have got out of her scrape if she had found no one to like or love with quite so much cherubic confidence that the liking would be returned, and the love — wouldn't. Well . . . There's a dash of Rudolf Rassendyll in us all! I picked up the little beauty; hoisted her on to my

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shoulder, and staggered out with her, swaggering and shouting as though she were my legitimate prize. That being presumed, nobody stopped us. The other two girls were left behind, and those gypsies were fiddling away like mad. . . . Their music was the incoming tide, dark and flowing. . . . We splashed through, and out into the street. Two or three cars were waiting on the cobbles, and I told her to bribe any driver of them — I couldn't speak their language, and she could! — to take her out to wherever her school was. Of what I should say to the headmistress — the headmistress, mark you! — I hadn't the remotest idea. I don't know now what I would have said if there had been a headmistress; only there wasn't, as you'll see presently.

"She was still wearing her Kirschner-Girl costume, a sort of cowslip-coloured tunic of thin silk; so I wrapped her in my overcoat. We drove for nearly two hours over those mournful Hungarian plains that are velvety purple by day, decorated with tall yellow sunflowers and fat white geese. They spread like heartbreak to the horizon. . . . No end to them. Of course, this was night, and I couldn't see where we were going.

"She snuggled down into my arms, and slept. . . . It's time that somebody disproved the continental legend of the 'cold English.' . . . Damn silly legend!

"At last we drew up at some tall iron gates, obviously the entrance to quite a big garden, if not an estate.

" 'I know my way now,' said Carla. She had told me her name. And then: 'Good-bye. Thank you!' And put up her face to be kissed — the scamp!

" 'Shall I see you again?'

" 'It depends!' She was poised, ready to be off.

" 'Depends on *what*?' I was in a blue funk that I should lose her altogether . . . while I waited for her answer.

"Which, incidentally, I never got, because by then, I was back here again.

"No, I can't tell you how it happened. It's no good asking me. I just know that I didn't wake up, or tumble down the chimney, or drift in on a moonbeam. Nothing of that sort. If the magic worked by any talisman — and it didn't seem like magic; it was all much too natural — but if it had a talisman, it was the cocktail . . . because I was still tightly grabbing the empty glass.

"How long had I been away? Yes, I thought you'd ask that. I had been away for exactly the amount of time I hadn't been here — not allowing for a journey out to Hungary and back. I must have been about an hour in the café, and about an hour and three-quarters in the car; and I left at — let me see, for what time had I invited you to dinner, Prentice? Eight o'clock? And I was getting the cocktail ready at,

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say, a quarter to 8. It was twenty-to 11 when the adventure shrank up and ended. And here I stood, gaping, with the glass in my hand, and Carla's clear laugh still in my ears, and not a blessed idea how I could get back to her!

"It was a week before it dawned on me that the bottle of Slivovitz might have had something to do with it. So I dressed as carefully as a bridegroom — for I might be going to see Carla again at any moment! and I drank some Slivovitz, neat. You would have laughed if you had seen the way my hand trembled when I poured it out. I spilt quite a lot of it on the table. . . .

"And then, you know, I didn't budge! Nothing whatever happened! You'd have laughed still more to see me standing there expecting to be whisked off somehow into the fourth dimension in Hungary; but standing on and on at my own dining-room table!

"I racked my memory for every story of enchantment that I had ever read; and I came to the conclusion that each detail had got to be exactly the same — to make the same spell work in the same way, and to the same end. So I waited till it was a quarter to 8, and I mixed myself exactly the same cocktail — I remembered the ingredients, because I had been rather precise about them, on the first occasion; I wanted to impress Dicky Foster, who's inclined to be swollen-headed about his private recipes.

"I drank. . . .

"It was all right, this time. I was back again in Hungary. But no, not exactly the same place; but in some sort of a great hall in a castle. Indeed — because I needn't bother you with my discoveries in proper sequence! — I learnt afterwards that it was the inside instead of the outside of Carla's 'School.' School? — The little devil! It was no more a school than this house is a school. It was her husband's country seat; and he was a count or a field-marshal — or both. At any rate, his servants saluted him.

". . . Carla appeared, presently. She came into the hall, where I sat disconsolate, looking at the great antlered beasts on the walls, and wondering where the hell I was this time, and what was going to happen next? She came down the carved staircase, very much grande dame, very decorous, and very decorative; and told me politely how glad she was to welcome me, and how sorry that her husband was away hunting.

"It was an unsatisfactory evening, on the whole. For she remained chilly; not in the least like the gamine whom I had seen carried on a tray in a heap of roses. She was so frigid that I hardly dared remind her of that escapade; nor ask her why she had played the trick on me, of pretending that she was still a schoolgirl when she was a wife? But at last, I did call up enough courage. She frowned at first, bewildered and

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angry. Then a gleam of light broke through — a very pale gleam.

" 'That must have been my wicked little sister, Carla. My twin sister. I am Zena, not Carla. We are so alike that it is difficult to tell us apart.'

" 'Is she,' I enquired, my heart thumping, 'is she in the castle now?'

" 'Yes, she lives with me. I would like to have left her longer at school, but they would not have her. She is too naughty and wild. So we are going to marry her quickly to a friend of my husband's.'

"After that, she wouldn't speak of Carla any more. I paid her compliments in stilted French. But Zena, who was, more formally, the Countess Janoschoza, didn't like me; or, if she did, she was too virtuous to show it. So she kept me in my place. . . . I might have been a vassal; they are feudal, those Hungarians! I was given refreshments; shown pictures. And still I sat there, longing and longing for Carla to come in. I didn't see Carla that time. . . .

"How in God's name did they account for me? I couldn't account for myself, certainly. But all the people I met took me for granted.

"Back I came, to these rooms of mine. Ten o'clock was striking. Forty minutes less than my last allowance of Paradise. The cocktail might have been slightly smaller.

"You can imagine, can't you, how I spent my time after that. I dared not keep on going back and back. Suppose I used up all my time, and that precious bottle of Slivovitz, on long sedate, amiable conversations with the Countess Zena, who was so like my wicked little love, Carla? So pretty, and so strikingly alike, but in behaviour how different!

"But I did see Carla again, on my fifth visit to the castle. By then, I was getting desperate. On my fifth visit, I saw Carla, and not Zena. Carla was as provocative and as impetuous as ever — and as fond of me. She only laughed when I demanded, with as much fierceness as I could command, how she had dared make me her buffoon on our last encounter?

" 'It was fun!' she cried.

"In my between-times here in London, in these rooms — for they only counted as between-times now; my new life, the life that mattered, was away on that fantastic bit of existence that had got loose and was floating about! — but in my between-times, I was trying to learn Hungarian, so that I could reach a more enlightened understanding with the twin sisters than by paying compliments to Zena, or kissing Carla. Have you ever tried to learn Hungarian, any of you? It's worse than Chinese. Somehow, when it came to the point, however much I swotted, I could never remember any more than *hideg* and *meleg*, hot and cold. 'Hot' meant Carla, and 'cold' was Zena, and I got no forrarder, and the Slivovitz was sinking in its bottle. Not a wine-merchant in London had ever heard of

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the stuff, leave alone supply it. I consoled myself by planning that, of course, the minute I had finished it, I could go out to Hungary properly, in a decent normal fashion, and stay there as long as I liked. It would be easy enough to find out the café in Budapest where I had begun my adventures; and easy enough to discover the castle of Count Janoschoza. Nevertheless, I was beginning to get worried — lots of things were worrying me . . . I never saw the twins together; that was odd. And then, neither of the sisters seemed curious about my spasmodic comings and goings; and I couldn't explain them; the whole affair was so incredible, and none of us knew enough French; and I wasn't there long enough; and I wanted Carla with me always. I had a horrible notion that Carla might equally have said, to whatever strange man had shot in on a cocktail, so to speak: 'I like you, I love you, I am frightened!' Supposing I lost the trick of re-entrance! Supposing the power went to somebody else; somebody better-looking, more — more dashing, than myself? And at the mere idea of such a rival . . .

"Oh, well, it's no good raving!

"My paper gave me the chuck at about that time. They said I was growing too absent-minded. That was literally the matter with me — absent-minded! Soul and mind and heart were absent, and only my reluctant body dragging about here in London.

"When I made my cocktail with the last of the Slivovitz — a bigger dose than usual! — I reckoned it would carry me over, to the fourth dimension or wherever it was, for about four hours. I had quite decided that this time I would contrive to make a definite appointment with Carla, only coming into Hungary the right way round, the real way.

"But I forgot!

"You'll hardly credit that. But if you'd had the same revelation . . . you'd have forgotten. It knocked everything else to blazes.

"The revelation was just this: there were no twins: Carla was Zena, and Zena was Carla; and she thought she was twins. It was her delusion.

"No wonder I had never seen them together! They had each talked so convincingly of 'my sister': Zena a trifle wistfully, as though regretting that little Carla was so wild and unmanageable and did such freakish things; and Carla, of Zena, rebelliously, a pout on her lips, her eyes sullen: Zena was so staid. She had married a year ago, when she was only seventeen! And Zena was so good; she never did anything bad; she would not even betray her husband, she! . . .

"I was told about this — this gemini complex, by a charming elderly Hungarian who spoke English, and whom I met there that night, at a dinner-party to which I didn't in the least want to go, only I had been tipped into the middle of it at somewhere round the third course,

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so that I couldn't very well rise and walk out. But my hours were too precious to waste in this fashion, and I sat there hating my neighbour, and wondering where Carla was? Where did she always hide herself? Surely she could be present, knowing that I worshipped her! that I was crazy for her! — crazy as Tzigane music stealing at night over the plains. . . .

"Zena sat at the head of the table. She smiled at me very graciously; but I knew she didn't like me. I guessed the elderly gentleman who spoke English to be the friend of Count Janoschoza, for whom they destined Carla, because she was ripe for marriage. Ripe . . . at eighteen, Continental fashion! If only I had carried her off that first time, instead of bringing her home to her sister . . . to herself! But I had been too dazed to realise what I should have done; and now I was too helpless and hemmed in — hemmed in by that exciting duenna, a bottle of Slivovitz! What a position for a lover!

"If I could only see Carla again, and get her well started for England, by the time my spell had stopped its work — And then meet her at the other end — You see what I mean, don't you? No, of course you don't. . . . Horace looks as though he'd like to take my temperature!

"The Tokay Aszúbor — seventy years old — was put on the table with the dessert; and the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room. They were very formal, these assemblies at the castle. It was then that I dropped into conversation with the only man present who could speak English — my rival, as I rather melodramatically termed him.

"He said: 'Do you not think our hostess is very beautiful?'

"I answered, daring him: 'Yes, but not so beautiful as her sister; as her twin sister.'

"And then he told me.

". . . I was not as surprised as you might have supposed. Subconsciously, I already had suspicions. I had never once seen them together. It had always been Carla or Zena; never Carla *and* Zena.

"Where I cursed my luck was that so often, by some whimsical irony, I met the Zena side of Carla, who was cold and virtuous and a little antagonistic; and so rarely, so very rarely, I had the good fortune to arrive just at the propitious moment to meet the Carla side of Zena. . . .

"I vowed grimly that I would wait no longer, but that the very next time Carla was uppermost — well, the Carla delusion, then; I don't care how you put it! — I would take what the cocktail gods had sent me. I needn't mind. The child had a husband, a protector. I needed to mind when I had thought of her as the little sister — the delicious urchin who looked up wide-eyed at the stranger from England, and said: 'I like you, I love you!'

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"I strolled out into the garden, after dinner. That Tokay was heavy, rich and cloying. While we sipped it, the Count clapped his hands, and got his gypsy band in, to play for us. So my pulses were racing that night!

"Down by the iron gates where I had first left Carla, I met her again — on the inside, this time. She was, of course, wearing the same dress she had been wearing when she had sat as Zena at the head of her table. But I knew she was not Zena any more, for she ran straight into my arms.

". . . At that moment, the devils dropped me back here. I don't know who they are, or what they are, or why they do it, but damn them! Damn them! The devils! They know I can't get back to her. . . . *Damn* them!

"I never saw her again. Though I went straight out to Hungary, by train and boat and train, I couldn't find the café of Kiss Ludo. There are dozens of Kisses — all up the streets of Budapest. The name is as common as Smith in England. But just this one café didn't exist. Nor, as far as I could discover, did the castle of Count Janoschoza exist; not on the normal and conscious plane, anyway. I circled Budapest at a radius of twenty and thirty and forty miles, like a hound casting. I went nearly frantic. I made enquiries everywhere.

". . . But all that world, and all those people who dwelt in it, they couldn't be reached in the direct way. Perhaps they had no independent existence apart from an unholy cocktail.

"I wasn't going to give up Carla, though. Obviously, the next thing to be done was to go to St. Rudigund, in the Carpathians, and get a good supply of Slivovitz — all that I could persuade the innkeeper to let me buy. It didn't matter what it cost — if it cost every penny I owned, Carla was worth it. Not Zena, you understand, who adored her husband, but *Carla*. And our meetings had only been one in seven! If I had any sense of humour left, that would have amused me!

"At St. Rudigund, the old chap I knew had died, and his successor at the inn had drunk all the remaining Slivovitz except seven bottles. I paid a fantastic price for these, because I simply couldn't bother to hide my eagerness. Then I rushed home. I dared not risk starting off from any other place, in case it would only work using the same room, the same table, the same glass, the same shaker. Carla was waiting, and somebody else might come along — she was like a fruit near its perfect hour. . . . One tap would knock it to the ground.

"Carla! . . . If you'd heard my heart thump as I sloshed in the ingredients, careful not to waste the Slivovitz, shook up the cocktail, poured it out, and drank it . . . Carla . . . Carla . . .

"Again, not a damn thing happened. I stopped where I was.

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"After the first shock of disappointment, it struck me that the cocktail hadn't tasted quite the same. Either the quality in one of the bottles, or the proportions were different. How much gin had I put in, before? And just how much French Vermouth? I hardly used any Italian, the Slivovitz made that unnecessary. A spot of lemon; a dash of bitters . . . Well, but a slack estimate of spots and dashes wasn't good enough. I had to remember exactly. It tasted wrong. I knew the right shade and flavour, as it ought to be, but this agitated tearing round Europe had shaken my memory. *How* much of the French Vermouth? How much gin? Did I jerk the Angostura twice or three times through the dropper?

"It was no good," David Merriman finished, morosely. "I've been at it ever since. No good. I've almost given up." During the latter part of his tale, he had been mechanically pouring out liquids from the bottles on the table, as though he could not stop doing it, now: as though he would have to go on mixing cocktails all his life, till perhaps accident should slant him obliquely on to the recipe he had forgotten. The men who listened to the story noticed a dark plum-coloured bottle, square in shape, with no label on it. He poured out all that was left of it, tilting it upside down as he did so. Then, in a sudden fury, he shook and shook and shook at the cocktail, holding the shaker high above his head, still with that hopeless rhythm of movement, as though he neither knew nor cared any more what would be the result, but was forced by some goblin Council of Ten to go on shaking cocktails for their amusement. Finally, noticing with listless amusement what he had been doing, he poured out the mixture, and nonchalantly passed the glass to Johnny Carfax.

"Try it?" he suggested. "It's the only refreshment I can offer you. It's about the hundred and seventh of a long line. I shall have to chuck it now, as there's no Slivovitz left; and Horace, bless his kind heart, can remove me quickly to a lunatic asylum."

Carfax said: "Not in my line, thanks. I don't mind a glass of sherry, but cocktails —" He shook his head, and passed on his glass to young Strake, who was nearest.

"Good luck!" cried Theo Strake, and drank it off.

. . . They all stared at the space where he had been standing. Theo was no longer there.

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Thomas A. Meehan, by his own account, has been "television producer, corporation executive, laborer, instructor, student, huckster, sucker, enterprising businessman and wage-slave; he has written in any available style or medium from textbooks to films, s.f. to TV." (He has even appeared in F&SF before, though under a different name.) A friend points out that such widespread zeal and enthusiasm may well indicate that Mr. Meehan is really a Hoka in disguise — and not such a good disguise at that, since he even looks like a furless mutation of those stellar teddybears. Whatever he may himself be, he observes the foibles of humanity with an acute eye, and here provides us with valuable notes on the future of spaceflight, advertising agencies and puppetronics.

The Wind's Will

by THOMAS A. MEEHAN

And a verse of a Lapland song
Is haunting my memory still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long,
long thoughts."
LONGFELLOW, *My Lost Youth*

BARNEY WADDLED IN, HIS PERPETUAL plastic grin on his irrestibly cute face. "Hi, friend!" his gay little voice piped.

Philip Harrington winced. I chose that inflection, he reflected. It never failed to elicit a joyful response from millions of children all over the world. And it never varied.

Barney sat in the pneumoplush, his muddy feet dangling half-way to the floor. The roboval reached suction tentacles toward the mud, its sterile spray poised. Harrington gestured it away. Torn between its built-in impulse and the human command, the robotic cleanser gave a tiny blue puff and short-circuited.

Harrington glanced at Barney, hoping that the puppetron hadn't noticed the incident. But then, he remembered, that sort of thing wouldn't bother Barney. Barney's eyes twinkled merrily at him, his dangling feet casually splattering mud on the chair and on the floor.

Barney had all the freedom from parental discipline that every little boy on Earth would like to have. He had been built that way. He had almost all the natural impulses of a

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healthy little boy but, untroubled by parents, never to be frustrated, untouched by the real world, the little puppetron had none of the more gory, curious or angry day-dreams of small children.

But he had day-dreams. This had been the delicate part of the design. And he had them fulfilled. That was what delighted millions of small children throughout the entire world.

If Barney wished for an adventure in the Wild West, in a jungle, anywhere on Earth or in the space surrounding it, the International Telecasting System — through Harrington — saw that that wish was fulfilled. Little children all over the world ecstatically saw Barney (The Barney Hour, ITS, every night) get whatever his little puppetronic circuits could desire. Barney's perpetual grin and merrily twinkling prisms made the puppetron an idol and a wonder and The Barney Hour the most profitable property ITS possessed.

"Hi, Barney!" a warm resonant voice said with just the right note of cheerfulness. With a little surprise Harrington recognized his own voice. He knew then that his unlined face was serene, with a slight smile. He knew that with his prematurely white hair he appeared as just the right father-image to Barney, a forever indulgent father.

Harrington leaned forward. "How are the Invaders from Space?"

"Cleaned up on 'em last night."

As the man did not respond Barney repeated, "Yup. Last night."

Harrington was startled. The Space Invaders had been budgeted to last three months. Barney's eyes twinkled merrily at him. It was not puppetronically conceivable that Philip Harrington had not been watching The Barney Hour.

"All of them?" the ITS executive asked anxiously.

"All of 'em," Barney replied emphatically.

And it took $4,000,000,000 to build a space platform duplicating those of the World Council, Harrington thought with a sinking feeling. Not to mention the even more expensive rocket ship — spaceship, really — which went beyond the Earth's orbit to bring the puppetronic Invaders down to Barney's Space Platform. For less than two weeks of story.

Harrington almost showed alarm as he thought of the budget, used up, about which Barney could never know. Fleetingly Harrington recalled a childhood memory of a budget of many years before, in the early days of TV. $4,000,000 — but just across the central band of one continent — had been all it cost. Harrington sighed. With only color and 3D they had been able to use "sets" and fake things. But with the Tingle-Tactile Tube, which seemed to delight small children and their more erotic elders, it was cheaper more often than not to give them the real thing.

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Harrington permitted a slight frown to crease his brow and gently warned the puppetron, "There may be others, you know. Don't you think you ought to keep a lookout?"

"Nope," Barney responded with a small boy's finality. "Got 'em all!"

Harrington looked at Barney with a cheerful sick smile. Barney's eyes twinkled merrily at him. ITS wouldn't like this.

"Maybe you'd like to go somewhere —" Harrington suggested hopefully "— on your own Space Platform, your very own —"

"Where?" Barney asked practically.

"You might —" Harrington fumbled "— find an Adventure!"

"What?" Barney asked with a child's directness.

Harrington wrenched his mind from the budget and back to the small boy's concept. "There might be Space Pirates!" he suggested eagerly.

"Aw, that's old stuff!" Barney crossed his stiff little legs.

Barney monitored the other programs, too. Took a small boy's delight in it.

Harrington had to suggest a story line. He tried to keep the expression of playful eagerness on his youngish face. If he didn't . . . A slight shiver ran through him.

"What would you like to do, Barney?" Harrington asked, appeal in his voice.

"Oh, I dunno." Barney leaned back in the pneumoplush, his twinkling eyes directed at the ceiling, dawdling. Harrington had a momentary vision of millions of youngsters watching Barney dawdle all through The Barney Hour. . . .

"Surely —" there was a trace of bitterness in the dulcet tones "— there is something you'd like to do on your own, your very own Space Platform. . . ."

"Naw. I'm tired of that ole Space Platform!" Barney informed him categorically.

$9,311,000,000, three months budget! Harrington tensed in spite of his relaxed pose. He hoped the gentle smile had not left his face. He couldn't discipline Barney. Anyway, Barney couldn't be disciplined. It wasn't built into the circuits.

Harrington had just one job. To keep Barney happy. That was all.

He had created and welcomed the job. That was before he had studied the psychology of little boys. . . . Now it was up to him, Philip Harrington, Executive Vice-President for The Barney Hour of International Telecasting System, one of the top men in ITS, to stimulate the little-boy imagination of the puppetron. . . . He couldn't. He couldn't think of a thing.

He looked at Barney. Barney's eyes twinkled merrily at him. Sometimes, he thought, sometimes I wish I had ordered just a little less twinkle in those prismatic lenses. Never mind that. Think of something. . . .

Barney's eyes twinkled at him.

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Harrington felt a surge of resentment. This is ridiculous! he thought. I'm reacting as though Barney were a person instead of a tangle of puppetronic circuits I ordered built.

"One of these days," he heard his voice say and he detected annoyance in the warm resonant tones, "one of these days, I suppose . . ." This is not the way to do it! his mind told him, no way to handle his own creation! He went on, ". . . you'll ask me for the moon!"

Barney sat up. His eyes twinkled at Harrington. "Gee! That's wunnerful!"

"What is?" Harrington was startled.

"I could take all my li'l friends there, too." Barney enlarged. His wondering tones sounded ominous to the ITS executive.

"Where?" Harrington asked, knowing the answer.

"On a trip to the moon, 'course," Barney stated matter-of-factly.

"Well — I'm afraid, Barney, that that would be . . ." Harrington couldn't say *impossible*. Technologically it was possible. And while small boys occasionally had to face reality, that must never happen to the puppetron. Not to Barney.

"Well, Barney," the executive parried evasively, "nobody's ever been there, you know, and —"

"Why not?" Barney wanted to know, as children do.

"Because — because it would be a lot of trouble and . . ." Harrington peered sharply at the merrily twinkling prisms. No. No small child would understand that the monumental cost of reaching airless useless rock in midspace was too great, great enough to overrule the most romantic of dreamers. ". . . and nobody ever really wanted to go there. Not enough, anyway." That was substantially true and put in terms which Barney could understand.

"But *I* do!" the puppetron piped with triumphant finality.

"Now, Barney —" he remonstrated in his gentle paternal tone.

"Gee! I'll need a Rocket Ship. Naw, I got one. 'N a Space Suit. Lotsa space suits. Fer the kids and me." Barney continued, "'N a place fer our moms 'n dads to stay while we're havin' fun!"

Space suits. Insurance. Fuel. Automatically Harrington's fingers started punching keys on the desk computer. An air bubble. Artificial atmosphere. Luna City, complete.

"'N Moon Dwellers. 'N a roller coaster. Boy, what a ride that'd be . . . !" Harrington's mind was wrenched from the childish patter. The desk computer had almost run out of zeros. He stared. He tried to interrupt, to divert the childlike mind.

"Barney, I have an idea. Maybe another Rocket Ship would be more —" he was about to say economical "— fun!"

"Naw," Barney disagreed. "I got one."

Harrington allowed a dubious

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note in his voice, keeping his serene smile. "It would be a lot of — trouble, Barney," he warned.

"Aw, that's awright!" Barney told him generously. "Gee! This is gonna be *lotsa* fun!" He slid off the pneumoplush. That settled it. For Barney.

Barney had never been denied anything. That was what made The Barney Hour the perfect wish-fulfillment, the program that no child in the world could resist. Barney couldn't — theoretically — be denied anything by ITS.

But there were limits. Even for puppetrons. Harrington hesitated, then reached a decision.

The little head just showed over Harrington's desk. Barney's eyes twinkled at him, merrily. Harrington set his jaw. "I'm afraid, Barney," he said with grim caution, "that we just don't have enough money. . . ." When the effect was not disastrous Harrington leaned back in his chair, rather pleased with his handling of the situation. "Nope. Nobody in the world has enough money to give you the moon!"

Barney beamed at him. "Oh, I got lotsa money!" He reached in his pocket and held out a handful of Barneycoins. Harrington had forgotten.

Through Barneycoins ITS had made The Barney Hour a sponsor's paradise, forcing reluctant parents to spend billions in additional sales. With a box-top of Popsi-Crisps or Crispi-Pops or whatever the product was, a Barneycoin would bring you a toy robot (humanoid), a ridable rocket, a needle gun (non-lethal traumatic type) or whatever novelty was being used to increase sales. To Barney — and to children all over the world — it was the only coin which had any value.

"That isn't quite what I meant, Barney —" he began gently.

"You want more?" Barney asked eagerly. "I'll ask all the kids to send me theirs!"

"No! Don't do that!" Harrington exclaimed. He thought of all the sponsors and shuddered. Barneycoins had value — to ITS — only if they were spread throughout the world helping sales.

"You don't need any money?" Barney exclaimed gleefully. Harrington couldn't explain about other money to the puppetron, not without destroying the basis of The Barney Hour. There was even the danger that Barney would start telling the children that there was another kind of money. He shook his head.

"When kin I have it?" the puppetron asked eagerly.

"What?"

"When kin I have the moon?" Barney repeated patiently.

"Barney —" Harrington leaned forward. His tone was firm but regretful. "I can't give you the moon, just because you ask for it."

The effect was startling. For a moment it looked as though Barney

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might short-circuit. Barney had never known, was never supposed to know, an experience like this.

The little prisms stared at him, glazed, uncomprehending. Harrington's brow betrayed cold beads of moisture. "Barney!" he called in his most soothing voice. "Barney!" The puppetron turned and staggered.

"All right!" the executive called out in desperation, "If you want the moon you can have it! Barney! I'll give you the moon!"

Barney hesitated and Harrington's heart skipped. Then the prisms twinkled. "Gee, that's swell!" the puppetron said in his gay little voice. He waddled out of the room on his stiff little legs.

The ITS executive literally wiped his brow. Of course there were duplicates in stock for any puppetron in case of accident, attuned to the circuit of the active model. But if this Barney had short-circuited, all the other inactive Barney puppetrons would have, mentally, been through the same terrifying experience.

He tried to think of a way out. There was none.

He would have to put through a requisition. Regardless of the consequences. For a moment Harrington thought bitterly of his dilemma. All he had to do was keep Barney happy — and within a budget. And ITS was no more capable of going over a budget than Barney was of having his wildest wish denied. Maybe if they could introduce just one inhibitory circuit . . . No, no, the whole basis of The Barney Hour would be gone. And so would his job.

He finished the requisition.

For a moment his mind concentrated on the delicate tracery of Channels. No man ever became an Executive Vice-President without mastering the vast spidery web of Channels. An executive who once forgot a single microlength of the myriad interconnecting strands was Out. An ITS executive had to Get Things Done. And through Channels. That was the first qualification for an ITS executive and, in a way, the only one.

Yes, he concluded, he could direct it to Larry. Larry was not the man who had advanced him through ITS and given him The Barney Hour, of course. He was the man Harrington had helped to replace that man.

For a moment the executive's hands played upon the buttons on his desk with a rapidity and sureness born of years of experience. He stopped. He sat back in his chair, waiting. He had sent the requisition through Channels.

ITS won't refuse me this, he rationalized. Even though it does run into billions. Not after all I've done for puppetronics. And the way they've publicized it.

Puppetrons had had no minds of their own when Harrington was put in charge. They walked and they talked. They were complex elec-

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tronic devices operated by highly skilled — and highly paid — technicians.

Then puppetronics developed through cerebrocrinology. The puppetrons were given the mind patina of good little children. But The Barney Hour still had writers, highly paid and quite often difficult. Because they had originated an idea they were singularly opinionated as to how it should develop.

Cerebrocrinology did away with all that by giving the puppetronic devices synthetic glands. Now the puppetrons thought, acted and even felt like little children.

ITS had been excited about puppetronics. Barney was a delight, to the audience and to the ITS accounting department. He thought up his own stories and played them out with Teddy the Panda, his perpetual pal, attuned to Barney's circuit. Actors, always a problem and an expense, were eliminated by various other puppetrons. At least on The Barney Hour.

Harrington was the man who had Put It Through. He had reluctantly carried out the enthusiastic orders of his superior regarding puppetrons, helped to oust him when puppetronics was proven a success and, naturally, received the credit. ITS should be grateful.

With that ability to face facts which had enabled him to rise so high, Harrington realized that ITS would not be grateful. ITS, a vast-spun organization, lacked that attribute as puppetrons lacked certain attributes.

The light on the camera — one in every office — came on. Harrington leaned forward in a relaxed but interested position.

The wall glowed, formed a picture. Then he seemed to be looking directly into Larry's office.

"Hi, Phil," said Larry with that genial intimacy demanded of all ITS executives. "How've you and Mary been?"

"Fine," Phil replied composedly. "Just fine. And Beatrice?"

"Just wonderful." Larry paused momentarily, smiling genially at Phil. "We must get together soon." This was the sparring period. Larry's eyes were searching for a chink in his armor.

"Love to." Phil replied. He was confident there was none. His face was serene, he knew, his blue eyes untroubled, the slight smile in place. "Any time." There was nothing in Phil's appearance to indicate anything but routine.

"Oh!" Larry held up the requisition as though he had just remembered it. "Production sent this up to me. . . ." He glanced at Harrington. Phil nodded slightly, serenely. Larry asked it casually, off-handedly: "The moon?"

"Yes." Phil injected a lift to his reply, as though this were a bright significant suggestion. "The moon."

Larry looked at the requisition and then again at Phil. His smile became more genial, his manner

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more casual. Phil recognized the danger signs and tensed.

"How are you and Barney Getting Along these days?" he asked pleasantly.

Phil knew it for the worst sort of threat. An executive who did not Get Along with people (or things), no matter how impossible they might be, was of no use to ITS.

Phil permitted his smile to broaden slightly, become quizzical. He hoped his own eyes twinkled now. "The little fellow still looks upon me as a father," he assured Larry.

"Then this was your idea?" Larry's voice jabbed genially.

Phil saw the trap too late. Larry had fixed the responsibility on him. There was no chance to maneuver or feint — briefly, to put the blame on someone else. Phil saw that he would have to fight it out on this line.

He allowed an eyebrow to rise. "Of course," he asserted.

Larry glanced at the requisition. He shook his head slightly. He chuckled. "Jack may grumble a little when he gets this . . ." he suggested.

Phil knew what he meant. Jack was the undisputed head of ITS. When he grumbled the delicate network of ITS all over the world trembled in response.

"Not when he realizes the Possibilities," Phil stated serenely. Larry looked at him now. Obviously he had no idea what was in Phil's mind. The important point was that he thought something was there.

Larry chuckled and shook his head. "Well, Phil, you know Jack!" he countered. " 'Money is money.' " For a moment they looked at each other, their guards down, in mutual understanding and sympathy. How Jack, who never Got Along with anyone, who had the most primitive idea of Values, whose only talent was for collecting dollars, had ever become head of ITS was a cryptic puzzle to both of them.

"Right after the Space Platform, too . . ." Larry jabbed. He looked up sharply. "Phil, can't you persuade Barney to use the Space Platform a little longer? Or that Rocket Ship?"

Now he was caught, between the puppet and the human. "Of course not!" He said it as though it should be obvious. He smiled mysteriously. "Don't you see, Larry? That's part of it."

Larry stared at him as frankly as Larry could stare. At least, Phil thought, I won't get a flat turndown. He can't turn me down until he finds out what I Have In Mind, Harrington reflected. And it had better be good.

He watched Larry's thought-processes as the executive turned from him to look again at the requisition, then at another sheet of microfilm that had been thrust on his desk. With a falling feeling he saw Larry's brow clear, saw him become genial, even expansive.

"I'm just a little bit afraid, Phil, that we might have a little difficulty

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pushing this through. . . ." Larry was relishing it with every appearance of deep regret. "You've used all your operations budget on the Space Platform. And now —" he chuckled at Harrington "— you're not using the Space Platform."

Phil looked mildly surprised.

"But this isn't operations, Larry. This is an Investment."

Larry stared at him. Phil knew that Larry couldn't admit he didn't know what Harrington was talking about. Phil smiled confidentially, man to man.

"Don't you see what it will mean, Larry?" he urged. Larry didn't. Phil stared tensely, searching. "The moon. Just for Barney . . ."

He stopped. A dawning look of realization was coming over Larry's face. "Oh, I see!" he said, Phil wondered what he saw. He had to go on.

". . . Fixed up a little, of course. So humans can stay there —"

"I think it's a wonderful idea!" Larry exploded. He looked at Harrington shrewdly, appraisingly. Phil hoped he would drop a clue. "Tell me frankly, Phil. Did you have this in mind when you requisitioned the Rocket Ship?"

He had to look confident. "Frankly, no. But you know how one thing leads to another. . . ."

Larry was staring at the ceiling, ecstatic. "It'll be the biggest advertising stunt the world has ever seen!" he exclaimed. "All those space-mad kids for so many box-tops of — what is that stuff? — and a few Barneycoins, going in Barney's own Rocket Ship —"

"On a trip to the moon!" Phil finished in a triumphant tone of wonder.

Larry looked at Phil, fortunately without a trace of a smile. "Harrington," he said, and his tone was business-like, "*I* think you're doing a pretty good job on The Barney Hour. . . ." The smile came back but the eyes remained challenging. "How do you like my idea?"

"I think it's wonderful, Larry. Just wonderful," he said promptly with just the right resonant warmth, just the right amount of casual confidence. He knew, now, that his serene manner had not deserted him once during the interview.

"Good," Larry grunted approvingly. "I'll take it up with Jack as soon as I've developed it. Probably tonight." He turned to Harrington. The business-like manner faded and the genial smile returned. "Phil, it's been great to have this little chat with you. Give my love to Mary, will you?"

"I certainly will, Larry," Phil answered cordially. "And say hello to Beatrice."

"I'll do that. And we must get together soon." He added, "I mean we really ought to." This was praise of the highest order.

"Love to," Phil answered. "Any time."

"See you soon, Phil."

"So long, Larry."

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Barney waddled in on his stiff little legs. "Hi, friend!" his gay little voice piped.

The deep lines of Harrington's face folded into a smile almost as perpetual as Barney's. "Back so so soon?" he asked and detected testiness in his voice.

"Yup!" Barney wandered aimlessly, listless and bored. Harrington felt his heart skipping.

"How was Jupiter?" He hoped the eagerness in his voice concealed his anxiety.

"Aw!" Barney dismissed it.

Harrington's jowls sagged. Barney dawdled. . . . Harrington glanced surreptitiously at the clock. Forty minutes to The Barney Hour. He ran his hand through his white hair, now yellow with age. Frantically he tried to think of an idea that would appeal to the childlike mind.

"I've got an idea, Barney. Why don't you—" The puppetron's prisms turned toward him with interest. Do what? "Take your Space Ship and go to all the planets you've discovered in the last twenty years. Mars, Venus, Mercury, Saturn—all of 'em. And see all the moms and dads you've left there, the colonists. A real merry-go-round all around the Sun! Doesn't that sound like *lotsa* fun?"

Barney's prisms stared at him fixedly. "Naw!" the puppetron answered.

Harrington half-rose from his chair and his face became dangerously red. "Why don't you take that Space Ship of yours and. . . ." The executive strangled his anger. This is only a puppetron, he reminded himself, only a bundle of circuits! "And go . . ." He fell back in his chair, his arm making a wide helpless gesture.

"Yeah!" Barney responded with a small boy's enthusiasm. "Gee! that's wunnerful!"

"What is?" Harrington asked querulously.

"There're lotsa stars besides our ole sun," Barney mused.

"You — you're going out in Space?" Harrington's voice quavered. His thin hands clenched into ineffectual fists, the blue veins standing out. Gently now, he told himself. "But you can't go faster-than-light, Barney! We haven't developed a sub-space drive; not yet, maybe not for another 50 years. We don't know, yet, how to convert space and time into units of energy, although our best scientists . . ." He saw from the lack of response in the puppetron's prisms that the words meant nothing.

He smiled an indulgent fatherly smile. "We— couldn't be with you any more, Barney."

"Aw, that's awright," Barney said generously.

"But the kids. They couldn't see you, Barney!"

"Aw, you kin fix that," Barney declared. The puppetron had an unspoiled faith in the omnipotence of the father-image. "Gee! This is gonna be *lotsa* fun! 'Bye."

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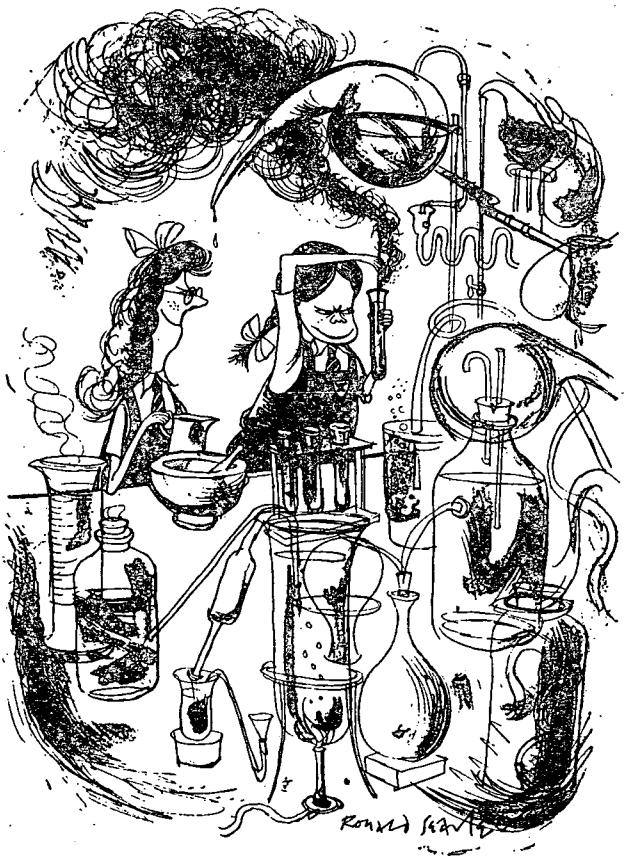
Barney waddled out of the room, and Harrington went back to work.

Maybe, Harrington reflected, maybe the half-dozen spatio-temporal physicists together with as many astrophysicists as he could get, under narcoempathy with forced teletransmission, hourly dosages of hypnohypo, constant electrostimulus through deep probe-shafts sunk in their brains, the thoughts of their combined hyperstimulated unconscious minds recorded on the tattlencephelograph, could produce the idea in a week, two weeks . . . ITS would provide generously for their families and Barney would have his interstellar drive.

He started to make out the requisition.



"O.K. — now pass the bat's blood."

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Since F&SF published her first story some three and a half years ago, Zenna Henderson has received honors in many fields, ranging from a master's degree to representation in the Bleiler-Dikty BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES *in 1953 and a well-earned second prize in Ellery Queen's detective story contest in 1954. This latest Henderson story should, I think, enhance an already high reputation; in a different vein from anything else she's written, it's an eerie glimpse of mingled horror and beauty which may disturb your mind for some time to come.*

Walking Aunt Daid

by ZENNA HENDERSON

I LOOKED UP IN SURPRISE AND SO did Ma. And so did Pa. Aunt Daid was moving. Her hands were coming together and moving upward till the light from the fireplace had a rest from flickering on that cracked, wrinkled wreck that was her face. But the hands didn't stay long. They dropped back to her saggy lap like two dead bats, and the sunken old mouth that had fallen in on its lips years before I was born puckered and worked and let Aunt Daid's tongue out a little ways before it pulled it back in again. I swallowed hard. There was something alive about that tongue and *alive* wasn't a word I'd associate with Aunt Daid.

Ma let out a sigh that was almost a snort and took up her fancy work again. "Guess it's about time," she said over a sudden thrum of rain against the darkening parlor windows.

"Naw," said Pa. "Too soon. Years yet."

"Don't know 'bout that," said Ma. "Paul here's going on twenty. Count back to the last time. Remember that, Dev?"

"Aw!" Pa squirmed in his chair. Then he rattled the *Weekly Wadrow* open and snapped it back to the state news. "Better watch out," he warned, his eyes answering hers. "I might learn more this time and decide I need some other woman."

"Can't scare me," said Ma over the strand of embroidery thread she was holding between her teeth to separate it into strands. " 'Twon't be your place this time anyhow. Once for each generation, hasn't it been? It's Paul this time."

"He's too young," protested Pa. "Some things younguns should be sheltered from." He was stern.

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"Paul's oldern'n you were at his age," said Ma. "Schooling does that to you, I guess."

"Sheltered from what?" I asked. "What about last time? What's all this just cause Aunt Daid moved without anyone telling her to?"

"You'll find out," said Ma, and she shivered a little. "We make jokes about it — but only in the family," she warned. "This is strictly family business. But it isn't any joking matter. I wish the good Lord would take Aunt Daid. It's creepy. It's not healthy."

"Aw, simmer down, Mayleen," said Pa. "It's not all that bad. Every family's got its problems. Ours just happens to be Aunt Daid. It could be worse. At least she's quiet and clean and biddable and that's more than you can say for some other people's old folks."

"*Old* folks is right," said Ma. "We hit the jackpot there."

"How old *is* Aunt Daid?" I asked, wondering just how many years it had taken to suck so much sap out of her that you wondered that the husk of her didn't rustle when she walked.

"No one rightly knows," said Ma, folding away her fancy work. She went over to Aunt Daid and put her hand on the sagging shoulder.

"Bed time, Aunt Daid," she called, loud and clear. "Time for bed."

I counted to myself. ". . . three, four, *five*, six, seven, eight, nine, *ten*," and Aunt Daid was on her feet, her bent old knees wavering to hold her scanty weight.

I shook my head wonderingly and half grinned. Never failed. Up at the count of ten, which was pretty good seeing as she never started stirring until the count of five. It took that long for Ma's words to sink in.

I watched Aunt Daid follow Ma out. You couldn't push her to go anywhere, but she followed real good. Then I said to Pa, "What's Aunt Daid's whole name? How's she kin to us?"

"Don't rightly know," said Pa. "I could maybe figger it out — how she's kin to us, I mean — if I took the time . . . a lot of it. Great-great-grampa started calling her Aunt Daid. Other folks thought it was kinda disrespectful but it stuck to her." He stood up and stretched and yawned. "Morning comes early," he said. "Better hit the hay." He pitched the paper at the woodbox and went off toward the kitchen for his bed snack.

"What'd he call her Aunt Daid for?" I hollered after him.

"Well," yelled Pa, his voice muffled, most likely from coming out of the icebox. "He said she shoulda been 'daid' a long time ago, so he called her Aunt Daid."

I figured on the edge of the *Hog Breeders' Gazette*. "Let's see. Around thirty years to a generation. Me, Pa, grampa, great-grampa, great-great-grampa — and let's see, for me that'd be another great. That makes six generations. That's 180 years —" I

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chewed on the end of my pencil, a funny flutter inside me.

" 'Course, that just guessing," I told myself. "Maybe Pa just piled it on for devilment. Minus a generation — that's 150." I put my pencil down real careful. *Shoulda been dead a long time ago.* How old *was* Aunt Daid that they said that about her a century and a half ago?

Next morning the whole world was fresh and clean. Last night's spell of rain had washed the trees and the skies and settled the dust. I stretched in the early morning cool and felt like life was a pretty good thing. Vacation before me and nothing much to be done on the farm for a while.

Ma called breakfast and I followed my nose to the buttermilk pancakes and sausages and coffee and out-ate Pa by a stack and a half of pancakes.

"Well, son, looks like you're finally a man," said Pa. "When you can out-eat your pa —"

Ma scurried in from the other room. "Aunt Daid's sitting on the edge of her bed," she said anxiously. "And I didn't get her up."

"Um," said Pa. "Begins to look that way doesn't it?"

"Think I'll go up to Honan's Lake," I said, tilting my chair back, only half hearing what they were saying. "Feel like a coupla days fishing."

"Better hang around, son," said Pa. "We might be needing you in a day or so."

"Oh?" I said, a little put out. "I had my mouth all set for Honan's Lake."

"Well, unset it for a spell," said Pa. "There's a whole summer ahead."

"But what for?" I asked. "What's cooking?"

Pa and Ma looked at each other and Ma crumpled the corner of her apron in her hand. "We're going to need you," she said.

"How come?" I asked.

"To walk Aunt Daid," said Ma.

"To walk Aunt Daid?" I thumped my chair back on four legs. "But my gosh, Ma, you always do for Aunt Daid."

"Not for this," said Ma, smoothing at the wrinkles in her apron. "Aunt Daid won't walk this walk with a woman. It has to be you."

I took a good look at Aunt Daid that night at supper. I'd never really looked at her before. She'd been around ever since I could remember. She was as much a part of the house as the furniture.

Aunt Daid was just so-so sized. If she'd been fleshed out, she'd be about Ma for bigness. She had a wisp of black hair twisted into a walnut-sized knob at the back of her head. The ends of the hair sprayed out stiffly from the knob like a worn-out brush. Her face looked like wrinkles had wrinkled on wrinkles and all collapsed into the emptiness of no teeth and no meat on her skull bones. Her tiny

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eyes, almost hidden under the crepe of her eyelids, were empty. They just stared across the table through me and on out into nothingness while her lips sucked open at the tap of the spoon Ma held, inhaled the soft stuff Ma had to feed her on, and then shut, working silently until her skinny neck bobbed with swallowing.

"Doesn't she ever say anything?" I finally asked.

Pa looked quick at Ma and then back down at his plate.

"Never heard a word out of her," said Ma.

"Doesn't she ever *do* anything?" I asked.

"Why sure," said Ma. "She shells peas real good when I get her started."

"Yeah." I felt my spine crinkle, remembering once when I was little. I sat on the porch and passed the peapods to Aunt Daid. I was remembering how, after I ran out of peas, her withered old hands had kept reaching and taking and shelling and throwing away with nothing but emptiness in them.

"And she tears rug rags good. And she can pull weeds if nothing else is growing where they are."

"Why —" I started — and stopped.

"Why do we keep her?" asked Ma. "She doesn't die. She's alive. What should we do? She's no trouble. Not much, anyway."

"Put her in a home somewhere," I suggested.

"She's in a home now," said Ma, spooning up custard for Aunt Daid. "And we don't have to put out cash for her. Besides, they'd never walk her and no telling what'd happen to her."

"What is this walking business anyway? Walking where?"

"Down hollow," said Pa, cutting a quarter of a cherry pie. "Down to the oak —" he drew a deep breath and let it out — "and back again."

"Why down there?" I asked. "Hollow's full of weeds and mosquitoes. Besides it's — it's —"

"Spooky," said Ma, smiling at me.

"Well, yes, spooky," I said. "There's always a quiet down there when the wind's blowing everywhere else, or else a wind when everything's still. Why down there?"

"There's where she wants to walk," said Pa. "You walk her down there."

"Well," I stood up. "Let's get it over with. Come on, Aunt Daid."

"She ain't ready yet," said Ma. "She won't go till she's ready."

"Well, Pa, why can't you walk her then?" I asked. "You did it once —"

"Once is enough," said Pa, his face shut and still. "It's your job this time. You be here when you're needed. It's a family duty. Them fish will wait."

"Okay, okay," I said. "But at least tell me what the deal is. It sounds like a lot of hogwash to me."

There wasn't much to tell. Aunt Daid was a family heirloom, like, but

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Pa never heard exactly who she was to the family. She had always been like this — just as old and so dried up she wasn't even repulsive. I guess it's only when there's enough juice for rotting that a body is repulsive and Aunt Daid was years and years past that. That must be why the sight of her wet tongue jarred me.

Seems like once in every twenty-thirty years, Aunt Daid gets an awful craving to go walking. And always someone has to go with her. A man. She won't go with a woman. And the man comes back changed.

"You can help being changed," said Pa, "When your eyes look on things your mind can't —" Pa swallowed.

"Only time there was any real trouble with Aunt Daid," said Pa, "was when the family came west. That was back in your great-great-grampa's time. They left the old place and came out here in covered wagons and Aunt Daid didn't even notice until time for her to walk again. Then she got violent. Great-grampa tried to walk her down the road, but she dragged him all over the place, coursing like a hunting dog that's lost the trail only with her eyes blind-like, all through the dark. Great-grampa finally brought her back almost at sunrise. He was pert nigh a broken man, what with cuts and bruises and scratches . . . and walking Aunt Daid. She'd finally settled on down hollow."

"What does she walk for?" I asked. "What goes on?"

"You'll see, son," said Pa. "Words wouldn't tell anything, but you'll see."

That evening Aunt Daid covered her face again with her hands. Later she stood up by herself, teetering by her chair a minute, one withered old hand pawing at the air, till Ma, with a look at Pa, set her down again.

All next day Aunt Daid was quiet, but come evening she got restless. She went to the door three or four times, just waiting there like a puppy asking to go out, but after my heart had started pounding and I had hurried to her and opened the door, she just waved her face blindly at the darkness outside and went back to her chair.

Next night was the same until along about 10 o'clock, just as Ma was thinking of putting Aunt Daid to bed. First thing we knew, Aunt Daid was by the door again, her feet tramping up and down impatiently, her dry hands whispering over the door.

"It's time," said Pa quiet-like and I got all cold inside.

"But it's blacker'n pitch tonight," I protested. "It's as dark as the inside of a cat. No moon."

Aunt Daid whimpered. I nearly dropped. It was the first sound I'd ever heard from her.

"It's time," said Pa again, his face bleak. "Walk her, son. And, Paul . . . bring her back."

"Down hollow's bad enough by day," I said, watching, half-sick, as

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Aunt Daid spread her skinny arms out against the door, her face pushed up against it hard, her saggy black dress looking like spilled ink dripped down. "But on a moonless night —"

"Walk her somewhere else, then," said Pa, his voice getting thin. "If you can. But get going, son, and don't come back without her."

And I was outside, feeling the shifting of Aunt Daid's hand bones inside my hand as she set off through the dark, dragging me along with her, scared half to death, wondering if the rustling I heard was her skin or her clothes, wondering on the edge of screaming where she was dragging me to — *what* she was dragging me to.

I tried to head her off from down hollow, steering her towards the lane or the road or across lots or out into the pasture, but it was like being a dog on a leash. I went my way the length of our two arms, then I went her way. Finally I gave up and let her drag me, my eyes opened to aching, trying to see in the dark so heavy that only a less dark showed where the sky was. There wasn't a sound except the thud of our feet in the dust and a thin straining hiss that was Aunt Daid's breath and a gulping gasp that was mine. I'd've cried if I hadn't been so scared.

Aunt Daid stopped so quick that I ploughed into her, breathing in a sudden puff of a smell like a stack of old newspapers that have been a long time in a dusty shed. And there we stood, so close I could touch her but I couldn't even see a glimmer of her face in the darkness that was so thick it seemed like the whole night had poured itself down into the hollow. But between one blink and another, I could see Aunt Daid. Not because there was any more light, but because my eyes seemed to get more seeing to them.

She was yawning — a soft little yawn that she covered with a quick hand — and then she laughed. My throat squeezed my breath. The yawn and the hand movement and the laugh were all young and graceful and — and beautiful — but the hand and the face were still withered-up old Aunt Daid.

"I'm waking up." The voice sent shivers up me — pleasure shivers. "I'm waking up," said Aunt Daid again, her soft, light voice surprised and delighted. "And I *know* I'm waking up!"

She held her hands up and looked at them. "They look so horribly real," she marveled. "Don't they?"

She held them out to me and in my surprise I croaked, "Yeah, they do."

At the sound of my voice, she jerked all over and got shimmery all around the edges.

"He said," she whispered, her lips firming and coloring as she talked, "he said if ever I could know in my dream that I was just dreaming, I'd be on the way to a cure. I *know* this is the same recurrent nightmare. I *know* I'm asleep, but I'm talking to one of the creatures —" she looked

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at me a minute "— one of the *people* in my dream. And he's talking to me — for the first time!"

Aunt Daid was changing. Her face was filling out and her eyes widening, her body was straining at the old black dress that wasn't saggy any more. Before I could draw a breath, the old dress rustled to the ground and Aunt Daid — I mean *she* was standing there, light rippling around her like silk — a light that cast no shadows nor even flickered on the tangled growth in the hollow.

It seemed to me that I could see into that light, farther than any human eyes ought to see, and all at once the world that had always been absolute bedrock to me became a shimmering edge of something, a path between places or a brief stopping place. And the wonder that was the existence of mankind wasn't unique any more.

"Oh, if only I *am* cured!" she cried. "If only I don't ever have to go through this nightmare again!" She lifted her arms and drew herself up into a slim growing exclamation point.

"For the first time I really know I'm dreaming," she said. "And I know this isn't real!" Her feet danced across the hollow and she took both my numb hands. "You aren't real, are you?" she asked. "None of this is, is it? All this ugly, old, dragging —" She put her arms around me and hugged me tight.

My hands tingled to the icy fire of her back and my breath was tangled in the heavy silvery gleam of her hair.

"Bless you for being unreal!" she said. "And may I never dream you again!"

And there I was, all alone in the dark hollow, staring at hands I couldn't see, trying to see the ice and fire that still tingled on my finger tips. I took a deep shuddery breath and stopped to grope for Aunt Daid's dress that caught at my feet. Fear melted my knees and they wouldn't straighten up again. I could feel terror knocking at my brain and I knew as soon as it could break through I'd go screaming up the hollow like a crazy man, squeezing the back dress like a rattlesnake in my hands. But I heard Pa saying, "Bring her back," and I thought, "All my grampas saw it, too. All of them brought her back. It's happened before." And I crouched there, squinching my eyes tight shut, holding my breath, my fingers digging into my palms, clutching the dress.

It might have been a minute, it might have been an hour, or a lifetime before the dress stirred in my hands. My knees jerked me upright and I dropped the dress like a live coal.

She was there again, her eyes dreaming-shut, her hair swinging like the start of music, her face like every tender thing a heart could ever know. Then her eyes opened slowly and she looked around her.

"Oh, *no!*" she cried, the back of

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her hand muffling her words. "Not again! Not after all this time! I thought I was over it!"

And I had her crying in my arms — all that wonderfulness against me. All that softness and sorrow.

But she pulled away and looked up at me. "Well, I'll say it again so I won't forget it," she said, her tears slipping from her face and glittering down through the dark. "And this time it'll work. This is only a dream. My own special nightmare. This will surely be the last one. I have just this one night to live through and never again, never again. You are my dream — this is all a dream —" Her hands touched the wrinkles that started across her forehead. The old black dress was creeping like a devouring snake up her and her flesh was sagging away before it as it crept. Her hair was dwindling and tarnishing out of its silvery shining, her eyes shrinking and blanking out.

"No, no!" I cried, sick to the marrow to see Aunt Daid coming back over all that wonder. I rubbed my hand over her face to erase the lines that were cracking across it, but the skin under my fingers stiffened and crumpled and stiffened and hardened and, before I could wipe the feel of dried oldness from the palm of my hand, all of Aunt Daid was there and the hollow was fading as my eyes lost their seeing.

I felt the drag and snag of weeds and briars as I brought Aunt Daid back — a sobbing Aunt Daid, tottering and weak. I finally had to carry her, all match-sticky and musty in my arms.

As I struggled up out of the hollow that was stirring behind me in a wind that left the rest of the world silent, I heard singing in my head, *Life is but a dream. . . . Life is but a dream.* But before I stumbled blindly into the blare of light from the kitchen door, I shook the sobbing bundle of bones in my arms — the withered cocoon, the wrinkled seed of such a flowering — and whispered,

"Wake up, Aunt Daid! Wake up, *you!*"

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW MY LIST of recommended reprints, coming at the end of this department, has been squeezed out by limitations of space. So this time let's start off with the reprints and make sure of listing any titles you may have overlooked on the newsstands.

Urgently recommended: You can't go wrong with any of the following, each representing as rewarding an investment in creative science fiction as you can hope to make with your quarter (or quarter plus dime): Karel Čapek's 1937 classic WAR WITH THE NEWTS (Bantam, 35¢), a long-out-of-print rarity fully worthy of the creator of R.U.R.; Fredric Brown's 1953 THE LIGHTS IN THE SKY ARE STARS (Bantam, 25¢), an unusually human story of politics, spaceflight and middle-aged love; Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s UTOPIA 14 (Bantam, 35¢), a retitling of the satiric PLAYER PIANO, worthy runner-up for the 1953 International Fantasy Award; MORE ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE (Bantam, 25¢), a second volume of selections from the superb 1946 Healy-McComas anthology containing 7 stories from *Astounding* 1937–1942, among them Cleve Cartmill's finest work, *The Link*, and one of the best of all Besters, *Adam and no Eve;* and John W. Campbell, Jr.'s WHO GOES THERE? (Dell, 35¢), not so much a reprint as a new edition including 6 stories from his two hardcover collections plus a brand new introduction by Theodore Sturgeon — a warm and just appreciation of Campbell's importance as a creator in writing (as Don A. Stuart) these stories which so admirably foretold the innovations in modern science fiction that he was later, as an editor, to evoke from other writers.

Of interest: Ray Bradbury's 1953 THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN (Bantam, 35¢), a mixed lot ranging from Bradbury's impressive best to his equally impressive worst; Richard Matheson's THIRD FROM THE SUN (Bantam, 25¢), a group covering almost as wide a gamut, selected from his 1954 BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN (musing aside: I suppose you have to be as brilliantly gifted as a Bradbury or a Matheson to seem so spectacular in your occasional failures); Robert A. Heinlein's 1954 REVOLT IN 2100 (Signet, 25¢), a lesser volume in the Future History featuring an extensively rewritten but still not quite convincing version

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of the 1940 *Astounding* serial, "IF THIS GOES ON —"; and Gore Vidal's 1954 MESSIAH (Ballantine, 35¢), a somewhat heavy and ill-constructed but magnificently thought-out study of a future religion based on the death-wish. (If one could only combine Heinlein's storytelling and Vidal's theological insight . . .)

Doubtful value: Murray Leinster's SPACE TUG (Pocket Books, 25¢), an acceptable 1953 juvenile republished (without warning) as an adult novel; David Karp's ESCAPE TO NOWHERE (Lion, 35¢), retitling of 1953's ONE, a self-consciously "literary" and singularly dull attack on the familiar Huxley-Orwell-Bradbury theme; Ambrose Bierce's THE MONK AND THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER (Avon, 25¢), an indifferently chosen Bierce selection (very little of it fantasy) — which I still hope may succeed well enough to elicit later cheap editions of better Bierce.

Avoid at all costs: 20 GREAT GHOST STORIES (Avon, 25¢), an anonymously edited group of wisely anonymous crudities; THE DELUGE (Lion, 25¢), a poor fantasy novella by Robert Payne labeled "a science-fantasy novel by Leonardo da Vinci"; Jerry Sohl's COSTIGAN'S NEEDLE (Bantam, 25¢).

Please note how many of these reprints, and particularly how many of the best, come from Bantam — obviously the reprint house that is, at the moment, devoting the most serious attention to science fiction.

While we're on the subject of the newsstands, let me note a few books of cartoons which contain some noble specimens of fantasy humor. Edna Bennett's THE BEST CARTOONS FROM FRANCE (Lion, 35¢), reprint of a 1953 hardcover collection, is a wholly entrancing anthology of, to quote Philippe Halsman's introduction, "a world where everything is possible [and] in which we are immediately at home." FRENCH POSTCARDS (Avon, 25¢), an anonymously edited paper original, is nearly as good . . . and even more devoted to those immortal themes which the puritan Anglo-Saxon considers characteristically "French." And the American Virgil Partch shows that he can rival the fantastic imaginings of any dozen Frenchmen in MAN THE BEAST AND THE WILD, WILD WOMEN (Dell, 25¢), a double-reprint of two hardcover volumes. CAVEMAN CARTOONS, edited by Harold Meyers (Avon, 25¢), may be skipped as unimaginative and drearily repetitious.

To turn to hardcover books, the oddest event of the year is the all but simultaneous appearance of anthologies on the same theme by two veteran editors: Groff Conklin's SCIENCE FICTION TERROR TALES (Gnome, $3.50*; Pocket Books, 25¢) and Donald A. Wollheim's TERROR IN THE MODERN VEIN (Hanover, $3.95*). What's perhaps even odder is that the Wollheim volume is, to my taste, incomparably the better of the two.

Both editors agree that the Gothic

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tale of supernatural terror is outmoded, and that science-fantasy is developing fresh and subtler horrors for our more skeptical minds. Now what one finds terrifying is at least as individual and unarguable as what one finds funny (either reaction, I imagine, being of acute interest to one's psychoanalyst). To some extent I can try for critical objectivity and say that Conklin lays more stress upon physical terror, Wollheim upon psychical, and that the Wollheim collection strikes a higher average of literary quality, covers a wider field of selection, and includes a much smaller percentage of previously anthologized wordage. But primarily it boils down to this: Mr. Conklin's terrors don't scare me and Mr. Wollheim's do.

This is not to say that the Conklin book is negligible; of its 15 stories (5 previously anthologized), 7 range from good to excellent in their ways, if only 1 is truly disturbing. (That one, Heinlein's *They*, is the only story common to both volumes.) Of Wollheim's 17 stories (3 previously anthologized), at least 12 are admirable, and 5 of these extraordinarily so: the Heinlein, H. G. Wells's *The Croquet Player* (originally a separate book), a fine Robert Bloch novelet from *Beyond* about silent films, and striking rediscoveries of old and forgotten magazine stories by Philip M. Fisher, Jr. and Vernard McLaughlin (this last accomplishing the impossible by lending new life to the Adam-and-Eve theme!). Stories by Bradbury, Grinnell, Kafka, Leiber and Lovecraft are only minutely less good; and the whole is (again I must say, to my taste) as disquieting a volume of subtle modern *wrongness* as you can ask.

(One small bone to pick with both editors: Since neither was wholly eschewing the familiar, how could either of them omit John Campbell's *Who Goes There?* and Philip MacDonald's *Private — Keep Out!*, each as unsettling as anything I know in this particular vein?)

Two recently published juveniles deserve your attention, not merely as presents for children, but for your own enjoyment. Ruthven Todd's SPACE CAT VISITS VENUS (Scribner's, $2*) introduces Flyball, that fine feline of free fall, to a planet of intelligent plants and enables him to establish telepathic rapport with the human space pilot who foolishly considers himself the cat's master. It's a witty and charming book — not to be judged by Paul Galdone's illustrations, which are cutely anthropomorphic ("Oh lookit the kitty in his darling little spacesuit!") as the text never is. (After this and the ghastly misrepresentation of Heinlein's Lummox, I wonder if anybody at Scribner's ever compares text and pictures.)

Ray Bradbury's SWITCH ON THE NIGHT (Pantheon, $2.50*) is, for all its brevity, one of Bradbury's major achievements to date—

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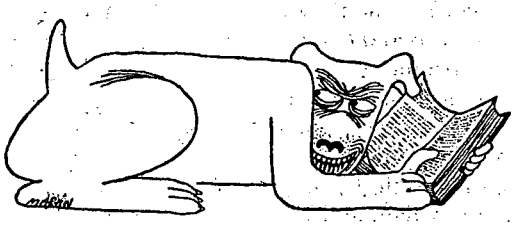
enough in itself to restore the confidence of anyone worried by those failures mentioned above. It's a simple and highly effective tale (to some extent autobiographical) of a child's conquest of his fears of the dark, told in glittering cascades of exquisitely tasteful poetic prose surpassing, stylistically, anything the author has attempted before; and the text is perfectly fused with the illustrations of Madeleine Gekiere to produce a new visual form beyond words or pictures. Forget about its being primarily addressed to the pre-school level; here is a superb creative work of imagination. (And appealing to *every* age. So many books are loved only by the very young and by the sophisticated. In this case my teen-age sons pronounced the unquestioning superlative: "Cool!")

The latest novels offer nothing in the way of literary depth or scientific ingenuity; but they do include two agreeable specimens of old-style out-and-out space opera. Robert Moore Williams' CONQUEST OF THE SPACE SEA (Ace, 35¢, with a reprint of Leigh Brackett's 1952 THE STARMEN, retitled THE GALACTIC BREED) is about the foiling of an alien invasion of our Plutonian outpost, and may remind you — with its robots, spies, supermen, *et al* — of Ed Hamilton in his best *Captain Future* days. And Stanton A. Coblentz's brand-new UNDER THE TRIPLE SUNS (Fantasy Press, $3*) sounds exactly like one of his first science-fantasies back in 1928 — adventure on an alien planet with Good (bird-like) and Bad (spider-like) native races, tinged with some amusing topsy-turvy satire. David V. Reed's MURDER IN SPACE (Galaxy, 35¢), first book appearance of a 1944 *Amazing* novel, and Charles Eric Maine's TIMELINER (Rinehart, $2.75*), an adaptation of a BBC radio play, are mere cliché-museums. As McComas said of the Maine novel in the *Times*, the recent Beaumont-Oliver spoof in F&SF included very nearly as many outworn devices in much briefer compass, and was *meant* to be funny.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 2.



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In 1953 F&SF had the honor of introducing to the English language the fiction of Kurd Lasswitz (1848–1910), the German professor whose novel AUF ZWEI PLANETEN (ON TWO PLANETS), *though never published in English, has probably had more influence upon factual science than any other work of science fiction. Lasswitz' short stories are far less serious than his novel; they are usually outrageous fantasy-caprices, though with an undercurrent of acute scientific satire — as in this 1885 story, now unearthed for us by Willy Ley, which pokes delightful fun at all the ponderous pretensions of Nineteenth Century German philosophy.*

Psychotomy

by KURD LASSWITZ

translated by Willy Ley

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS AN Assistant Professor of Philosophy whose name has to be mentioned for positive identification: it was Dr. Schulze. One afternoon he was sitting at his desk, trying to give shape to his thoughts. But that was difficult for they did not have enough volume to be even properly cloudy. What there was of them ran as follows:

Another philosophical writer had misunderstood him completely. This was due, of course, to vulgar contrariness, to contradiction not even for argument's sake but on principle — the principle being the supposition that nothing can be true but the critic's own opinion. If people would only realize that one's opinions score their greatest victory if they are sacrificed for the purpose of replacement by a better set . . . Obviously truth speaks for itself, provided that the inertia of error could be stopped. If one could only neutralize contradiction by others . . . Then everybody would surely agree with Dr. Schulze's treatise *On Emotions*. The trouble was that he lacked a method for this. The best was indubitably the experimental method. If one had it one could easily measure the width of consciousness, the depth of an emotion or even the height of an ideal.

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While he was thinking there was a knock at the door and immediately afterwards a man entered. He wore a heavy overcoat, for it was winter, and he carried a box which he put on Dr. Schulze's desk. Then he sat down. It was impossible to tell whether he was young or old, his forehead was so high that there was not much room for hair, but the eyes under the bushy eyebrows appeared as luminous as stars. The visitor began to talk.

"Please permit me, Herr Doktor, to acquaint you with the latest accomplishments of science. I am a psychotomist and right now engaged in a business trip to make contacts for my preparations; if you want to you may regard me as a *commis voyageur* in philosophical requirements. You don't quite understand me? Oh yes, I see some doubt there; permit me please. . . ."

He reached over and into Dr. Schulze's hair and in precisely the manner in which one might remove a beetle or a grasshopper from somebody's clothing he took a small something which he placed on the rim of the inkwell. With great surprise Dr. Schulze saw an enchanting small lady, hardly an inch tall, who immediately bent down for a drink from the inkwell.

"This," the psychotomist explained, "is the Category of Negation who made it hard for you to follow my exposition. I have therefore removed her and you'll be surprised by the results."

"But, my dear sir . . ."

"Please, Herr Doktor, your doubts now are merely an aftereffect. Don't fear, I'll put her back into your make-up later. She'll strengthen herself in the meantime, for ink is her favorite liquid refreshment. But to go on. You must know that the brain physiologists fail to arrive at any reliable philosophical results. We psychotomists have chosen another road for this reason; we dissect the ego. One must not just 'think' logical abstractions. One has to make them real; they need personification. Yes, I know you are going to say that that isn't a new thought and it can be read in Plato's works. But did he succeed in making them real enough so that one can actually handle them? He did not! But our preparations are personages — incomplete, of course, since they are only parts of the human personality; but they are alive."

"This is perfectly clear to me," Dr. Schulze replied. "You evidently have a method —"

"Dear Doktor, the method of psychotomy is something I can't develop today. Please be satisfied for the nonce with the results. I have brought the most important ones along."

He opened the lid of the box and took out a few cartons and jars.

"First a few minor things," he said. "These are our earliest products; we began with them and practiced on them until we progressed to the functions of the soul. Here,

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for example, are the Platonic ideas."

He handed Dr. Schulze a small sealed package. Schulze tried to unwrap it, but the stranger snatched it away from him.

"No!" he cried. "Mustn't open. Without a material shell the ideas are invisible."

"But how would I know what's in the paper?"

"You simply have to believe me. Here are a few of the atoms of Demokritos. They grew a bit too large and I'll gladly make you a present of them if you want them. And how do you like this little universe *in nuce?* Looks pretty between the two halves of a walnut shell, doesn't it? I admit it's a bit dark inside; it is one of Leibnitz's monads, they are that way. Here in this jar is something quite rare but I'll sell it to you cheaply; it is a sample of Kant's Pure Reason."

"But this looks quite gray."

"Well, it grew a bit dusty in a hundred years, but if you have it popularized it will be like new. But now: the recent accomplishments."

He put some of the things back into his box and Dr. Schulze noticed a few strange bundles. "What funny sausages you have there."

"These are space samples."

"Space samples?"

"Yes! Samples of the various kinds of space, positively or negatively curved, with three, four, five and *n* dimensions. We sell by the dimension, so and so much per foot. I'll leave some with you."

"What's the arrow and the comb?"

"Oh these. They have been marked down. Really not of much use except maybe as window trimming. That arrow is the one often called the 'eleatic arrow' in elementary texts, the arrow which rests in flight? And the comb has been made from the turtle which Achilles could not catch. But watch now."

He put three objects on the desk. One was a glass box, furnished almost like a doll house. A large number of tiny fairy-like figures were moving around in it and Dr. Schulze at once classified them as the Categories of Reason because they so closely resembled the Category of Negation who had meanwhile consumed a good amount of ink.

"One would hardly think," he mused, "that just the Categories of Reason, something that sounds admittedly dry, would have such beautiful figures."

"That's true," the psychotomist agreed, "but it can be explained by their pure philosophical origin. And they have to be female, of course; you can sense that from the sound of their names — names like Quantity, Reality, Causality could not belong to men. There: see this lady in the colorful veils who is slowly turning around? That is Limitation; she causes things to be neither black nor white, neither yes nor no — you have no idea how much she is in demand around election time. Here you have the Category of Possibility,

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in great demand with the clergy, and there is her twin sister Impossibility — we can write our own price for her with defense lawyers. But we now progress to the emotions."

He opened a round box full of dark, small and slimy spheres.

"Caviar!" Schulze said with conviction.

"Looks like it, but these are prepared emotions and moods. Look more closely, you'll see that each of them has its own characteristics. But they are, in a manner of speaking, the lower organisms of philosophy — but important just the same. Their sliminess often causes trouble: you think you picked Pleasure and when you look closely it turns out to be Disappointment. We have numbered them — here's the list — because there are too many. I can't sell them separately because they keep only when complete. Also nobody would buy Sorrow or Fear or Anxiety. . . . Now, I couldn't bring any human character traits along (they are still being purified) but here are the ideals!".

"I should have thought them liquor samples," Dr. Schulze admitted.

"In a way they are, because they have to be kept in alcohol for storability. If you look through the bottle against a light you'll see slightly luminous figures. Here, the bottle with the red stopper contains Freedom. It's a small sample, but we are, after all, in Europe. Here is Humaneness — I had more of that, but my best customers are the various Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This one here contains Immortality — doesn't sell well, people think that the best variety is self-made. I must leave you now, but I'll leave these samples with you so that you can study them at leisure. And this item here might interest you too."

It was a fairly tall narrow glass vessel, filled with a liquid in which a small figure, something like a little devil, was floating up and down.

"What's that? What do you call it?" Schulze said.

"Advanced Nonsense," the psychotomist replied, disappearing.

After some reflection, Dr. Schulze came to the conclusion that all this might have been a cloak for a burglary or theft of some sort. But he had to realize that his powers of deduction were not very efficient, for nothing was missing. And there were, on his desk, the glass box with the Categories, the container with the Moods and Emotions, the little bottles with the Ideals in them and even the strange sausages containing semi-mathematical space samples. He noticed that La Negation was still perched on the rim of the inkwell. Too bad; the psychotomist had neglected to put her back. On the other hand, the man would certainly return for his samples and in the meantime Dr. Schulze did not feel unhappy without her. He looked for a while at the glass box with the

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Categories and carefully lifted the lid off the container of Emotions and Moods. Then it struck him that he needed fresh air. While descending the staircase he tripped over the landlady's tomcat and almost fell — it made him very happy that he had not hurt the dear little animal.

Outside the door he noticed that one of the small spheres from the box of emotions was sticking to his thumb. He could make out that it bore the number One and remembered that the list began with Contentment. He felt most content that he had not lost it and put it in his matchbox for safekeeping.

In the morning snow had fallen and during the afternoon there had been a slight thaw. As a result half-melted snow covered the cobblestones so that it was hard to take a few steps without slipping. It was quite dark, for a fog swallowed up the last of the evening twilight but the street lamps were not yet on. A workman carrying a bag of flour ran into Dr. Schulze who most politely begged his forgiveness. He then noticed that flour had spilled on his dark overcoat and watched with fascination and contentment how the fog changed the flour into pleasing paste.

The next man he met was City Councilor Billig whom he had often annoyed by his criticism of municipal administration.

"This weather isn't fit for dogs," the City Councilor growled. "To scrape up all this snow and cart it away will cost . . ."

"Yes, yes, of course," Dr. Schulze interrupted him, "that will put money into circulation, but it is just as nice to leave the snow where it is. Our cobblestones are quaint and picturesque and the melting snow between them is a fine example of Nature's way of evening things out. Any civic-minded person should insist upon keeping our city as natural as possible."

"Doctor, I hope you are not making fun of the city's administration —"

"I assure you, Councilor, that I am perfectly content. I only wish that others would realize the educational value of difficult streets. The darkness will improve the senses of both pedestrians and drivers. It preserves city funds and it may augment the savings of doctors and surgeons. Just consider how much unnecessary expenditure for dresses and toiletries is saved by the simple fact that it is too dark after 4 P.M. for our ladies to be seen in the streets. If I were an alderman . . ."

"You will be one, you will be one, I'll see to it."

"Thank you ever so much. You can count on it that I'll vote 'yes' for any ordinance anybody might wish to pass."

"Including the planned new city tax?"

"Of course. I favor taxes. Nothing can give me a greater feeling of contentment than to sacrifice my worldly

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goods for the welfare of the community."

"Bravo! Doctor, you are practically elected. I am leaving for my favorite Bierstube now and I'll have at least ten votes rounded up for you before the evening is over."

The idea of a beer struck a responsive chord in Dr. Schulze and he turned the corner toward a place where he would be sure to meet some of the faculty. He had hardly walked a hundred yards when he ran into a lady whom he usually avoided carefully. Linolinde von Zwinkerwitz was, to speak politely, of talkative habits, and for the last ten years she not only claimed that Dr. Schulze courted her, she also forced him into long conversations at every opportunity. Schulze told his colleagues that she had cost him two full semesters, the semester counted as three months, the month as twenty days and the day as 90 minutes, which was the length of his class on the history of Greek philosophy prior to Sokrates.

Linolinde von Zwinkerwitz was charmed with Dr. Schulze's completely unexpected pleasant manners and with little hesitation she admitted that she had written a novel, only a few hundred pages. Would he like to read it?

"But with the greatest of pleasure, my dear lady! In fact I am looking forward to the opportunity to peer into your soul."

"You don't know, doctor —"

"I do know that I'm content."

Linolinde pressed his arm: "Why shouldn't we admit that we understand each other?"

"We do," he replied, although he had a faint feeling that this was not what he really intended to say. As has been mentioned, the streets, thanks to City Councilor Billig's careful management of the municipal finances, were dark. But somebody cleared his throat and Linolinde suddenly disappeared. Schulze happily entered his Bierstube, almost colliding on the doorstep with the head of the Department of Philosophy, Professor Oberwasser.

The evening turned out to be quite difficult for Schulze for he simply couldn't say no to anything. He promised the geologist to accompany him on a field trip the next day, an all-day trip. But he also promised his neighbor at his left to help him with some literary research in the University Library at noon. And after both of them had left he accepted an invitation for lunch from a later arrival. During the exchange of travel reminiscences he lost himself in a thick net of contradictions and lies, for whenever somebody asked him whether he had seen this or that he was compelled to say yes. Finally he got himself into the bad graces of Professor Oberwasser who was heavily engaged in a literary feud with the philosopher Weisschon, concerning the possibility of the demonstrability of Nothing.

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"Can any sensible person," Oberwasser thundered, "believe that the simple negation of a concept, by a process of abstraction, could result in a determination which is logically equivalent to the Non-assumption of the Not-being?"

Of course he expected Schulze to say *no* with conviction, but to everybody's surprise Schulze said:

"Difficulties notwithstanding, one must accept the Nothing as a positive value because it is impossible to negate it. As regards your essay, which I recall with positive pleasure, I feel that you are just as right as Dr. Weisschon, since in the end all judgments of all people must be affirmative."

At that Professor Oberwasser rose in indignation, convinced that Schulze had had too much to drink. This, of course, was true. Whenever the waiter asked Schulze whether he would like another glass of beer, Schulze was unable to refuse; besides, he enjoyed his beer with great contentment. It grew very late and when the restaurant closed and Schulze had to go home there was still a minor delay because he had to tell the night watchman how much he envied him the pleasure of standing all night, leaning against a wall, in slowly melting snow, the familiar view of the old city transformed into a strange mystery by the dense fog.

When he woke up it was almost noon. He tried to reconstruct the events of the previous night but found large gaps in his memory. Then he noticed the landlady's tomcat which was sitting on the chair next to his bed, watching him with a strong expression of disapproval. Not only that, but the cat was holding his Category of Negation between his front paws; the animal had probably thought her a mouse or a bird and caught her. He reached out almost in a reflex movement, but stopped when the cat opened his mouth and talked.

"Just stay where you are, my venerable doctor, and don't waste time marveling at the fact that I am talking to you. Literature has been so full of talking tomcats that one more really doesn't make any difference. Besides, they all had far less reason to speak than I do, because during the night I ate all the Categories on your desk."

"Holy Immanuel," moaned Dr. Schulze. "How many of them?"

"Unfortunately I did not count them and regret very much to be unable to decide the old controversy about the number of Categories. But while I'm at it I might call your attention to the fact that it is now twelve noon and that you are not in the library as promised. Of course you also failed to cancel the lunch invitation and you did not meet Professor Steinschleifer for his geological field trip."

"I know, I know; these gentlemen will no doubt be angry. But please, return my Negation to me."

"Patience," said the cat. "I still

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have to add a few things. After your discussion with Professor Oberwasser last night I have the feeling that your promotion may be delayed for quite some time. That you lost your lighter, ruined your overcoat and spent all your cash is relatively unimportant by comparison. Oh yes, the mailman was here and I think you ought to know what he brought."

"Go ahead," Schulze said quietly.

"Well, City Councilor Billig writes that your election is in the bag" — Schulze emitted a cry of horror — "and that your other remarks encouraged him to talk to the tax commissioner. Then we have a subpoena for a hearing . . . let's see . . . 'with reference to premeditated insult of the Municipal Night Watchman Warmbier, while the latter was on duty.' Then there is a heavy manuscript, *Night of Heart and Might of Love:* A Novel, by Linolinde von Zwinkerwitz, and another manuscript by the same hand, *On the Immortality of the Soul: Thoughts of a Living Person.* Plus a letter saying: 'Darling! I told mother. She expects you for lunch. I'm so happy. Ever thine, Linolinde.' — In short, my dear Dr. Schulze, next time you go out with Contentment don't leave Negation at home. I have the honor to restore her to your make-up."

The cat suddenly looked like the psychotomist. Schulze felt some pressure against his head and then both cat and Negation has disappeared. Schulze jumped up, put on a bathrobe and stuck his head in very cold water.

The first thing he saw in his study was his little dog named Nonsense; one of the space samples was hanging out of his mouth. The dog had thought them digestible; but when he swallowed them, the coordinates had come loose and now the dog was on the floor, curled up in all dimensions and motionless. Schulze bent down to pick him up, but a familiar voice said:

"Just leave him alone, Schulze; this is only temporary. A true philosopher's dog will get rid of metageometry just as soon as he finds out that it can't be digested."

The voice belonged to Schulze's closest friend, Adolf Miller, M.D., who was lying on the sofa, happily smoking a cigar. "Boy, do you look awful," he continued. "I'm sorry that I didn't leave some of that caviar for you. Incidentally, who made you a present of that?"

"For God's sake, Miller, you didn't eat the contents of that box, did you?"

"I did — it was wonderful. You don't mind, do you? I also drank those liqueur samples. A bit strong, but good."

"This is awful, awful, awful. Man, those were my Emotions and my Ideals. You've swallowed the Emotions and Ideals of humanity, you cannibal. What do you think will happen to you now?"

"Emotions in caviar and Ideals in

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schnapps? You philosophers are more practical by far than one would think. Well, you see it didn't hurt me, medical men have to be above such minor matters. Incidentally, here's your lighter, you lost it on the staircase. Oh, there is another of those sturgeon eggs —"

"Keep it. That's Contentment."

"Probably a new variety of parasite. I'll try to make a culture of it. And now tell me what happened to you."

Schulze confessed.

After he had finished the doctor felt his pulse and said: "What you need is more sleep. Go back to bed; in the afternoon you'll feel better. You should be happy that that tomcat and I ate those things up — they wouldn't have agreed with you. I'll leave you alone now; you can give me another one of your cigars for the road, provided, of course, that it doesn't contain some psychological monstrosity."

After he had left, Schulze, instead of going to bed, sat down at his desk. He dipped his pen into the inkwell which was only half full and wrote apologetic letters. And because his Category of Negation was full of ink he began writing a book review after the last letter had been signed. After that was done, too, he rested his heavy head in his hands, stared into space and thought of the psychotomist and his gifts. They were all gone now — except for one tall glass out of which a little devil stared at him with unwinking eyes.

It was Advanced Nonsense.

Coming Next Month

Our next issue, on the stands in early July, will introduce a novel experiment in magazine contents: We'll bring you Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson separately, each in strong serious stories of interplanetary exploration and conflict, and then show you how uniquely their talents combine in the latest of the uproarious adventures of those earnestly imitative transgalactic teddy bears, the Hokas: *The Tiddlywink Warriors*, in which you'll be delighted by the Hokan concept of the French Foreign Legion. There'll also be a powerful novelet of future crime and punishment, *Two-Handed Engine*, by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, and new short stories (no reprints this time) by such favorite F&SF authors as Mildred Clingerman, Charles Beaumont and the late Elisabeth Sanxay Holding.

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Charles W. Morton, associate editor of The Atlantic Monthly *and himself an essayist for whom the adjective* urbane *might have been invented, is particularly noted among fellow writers and editors for his useful invention of "the all-purpose story." As a special service to F&SF's readers and contributors, here is his all-purpose ghost story — which a number of our would-be contributors obviously read on its earlier* Atlantic *appearance, since every mail delivery brings a copy with the blanks filled in. As Mr. Morton too truly observes, "It practically writes itself, once you get the thing going."*

The All-Purpose Ghost Story

by CHARLES W. MORTON

"I DON'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS — YET how else to account for what happened to me that night in ——?"

This model opening sentence is adjustable in various ways, but the main point must be made at the very beginning: It's a ghost story; eerie doings impend. Once he understands that, the reader will find something spooky in even the most commonplace details.

With the full gullibility of the reader thus fired at the take-off, the ghost-story writer need only breeze along, filling in the blanks as he goes.

"It was late in the afternoon when I finally reached ——," he continues. "I had been —— ing hard all day and I was looking forward to a ——, a good ——, and the possibility of —— the next morning."

Any reader who will stick with a ghost story, once he knows it for that, is a highly suggestible personality. He creates his own atmosphere for himself out of anything the author sees fit to tell him, so it matters little what the layout at —— proves to be.

"There was nothing about the outward appearance of No. —— that was in the least unusual, but as I mounted the steps and rang the bell I had a sudden feeling of ——. I noticed, too, that a —— across the street seemed to be eying me rather closely, but I must confess that I thought nothing of it at the time."

Just who the author's host will

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be at No. —— is easily settled. It can be an old friend, though a landlady would do just as well — but only one in either case. ("I realized when Blank answered the door himself that his servants must have left and that we were alone in the house. . . .") You can't afford to have too many people around in a story of this kind.

The reader ought to have built up a fair head of steam by this time and be ready to assign odd meanings to any old statement. "The hall was brightly lighted" will worry him as much as no lights at all. If the author reports a window open, the reader wonders who opened it. Was it Blank? Why was it open?

A few such details set the reader up for the first really scarey development — the extraordinary change in Blank (or the landlady): "The warmth of my welcome was like old times, but I was hardly prepared for Blank's appearance. He was much ——er than when I had last seen him; his ——, which I had remembered as downright ——, was now quite ——. His ——s, too, were no longer as I had known them. All in all, he seemed like a man who had ——ed, if I may be permitted the word."

Reader and author alike are thoroughly frightened by the way Blank is looking, and here is just the moment to plant another disturbing trifle: "I could not help noticing, as we exchanged greetings, Blank's ——; it was very old, as I could tell at a glance, and of curious workmanship." (This item could be almost anything — Blank's clock, teapot, set of false teeth, or what you will. It may be that nothing will come of it anyhow, but there it is, if the author finds later on that he needs it. Meanwhile, it sets the reader to breathing noisily.)

"The room to which Blank showed me seemed cheery enough," the story goes on, "but I was struck by the huge —— which occupied almost one entire wall. Once or twice, as I turned suddenly and looked at it, I could have sworn that it was ——ing, but this, of course, was absurd. ——s simply do not ——, I told myself."

Let us not linger over Blank's dinner (unless the author fancies himself as a food-and-drink expert), and the conversation over the cigars can be cut short, too. Blank himself certainly won't be allowed to give the story away at this juncture, and the author is still feeling the effects of a hard day's ——ing. The sooner both men are in bed, the better. Thus: —

"So far as I could tell, my room was just as I had left it, but the —— seemed even larger than before. Its bulk dwarfed everything else, and I was uncomfortably aware of it as I dropped off to sleep.

"I have no way of judging how long I slept, but suddenly I was wide awake. The room was pitch black; all was still. Then I heard, faintly and as at a great distance, the

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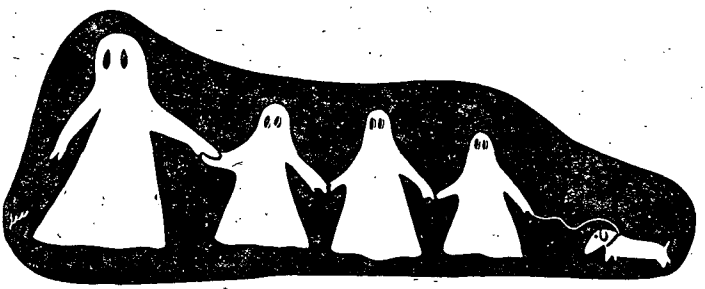
sound of ——ing. It was as if a very ——, ——, or a ——, were being ——ed, far away. I cannot describe the feeling of ——, of ——, of sheer ——, that swept over me. The ——ing grew louder. It seemed to be coming from the general direction of the vast —— that I have mentioned. My —— was ——. I tried to ——, but to no avail. Suddenly I realized that I could see taking form in the darkness the unmistakable outlines of a —— (*italics*)!

"At that point I must have —— —— altogether, for the next thing I knew, it was —— ——, and Blank was ——ing —— —— —— jug of hot water.

"I —— —— —— ——, Blank —— —— —— ——, and the house was sold. Shortly afterwards, I came upon this story in my evening paper: —

" 'Workmen ——ing an old house at No. —— —— Street discovered today in the wall of a bedroom the mummified remains of a ——. Police are investigating.' "



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All too often, British writers of science fiction have insisted upon envisioning a purely American future, with space dominated by American spacemen from American spaceports. Arthur C. Clarke is too wise a writer to succumb to the superficial commercialism ("American markets pay better, don't they?") which has prompted such treason; and in such novels as the classic PRELUDE TO SPACE *and the brilliant recent* EARTHLIGHT *he has seen to it that Britain (as is indeed logical and probable) claims her honored share in the conquest of space. Now, in this new story for which* you *can provide the title (see page 123 for details), he writes of a situation never before touched on in science fiction — a moving situation which is bound to arise in time, and which only an Englishman (and one as talented as Clarke) could write.*

?

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

"WHEN HE COMES ABOARD," SAID Captain Saunders, as he waited for the landing ramp to extrude itself, "what the devil shall I call him?"

There was a thoughtful silence while the navigation officer and the assistant pilot considered this problem in etiquette. Then Mitchell locked the main control panel, and the ship's multitudinous mechanisms lapsed into unconsciousness as power was withdrawn from them.

"The correct address," he drawled slowly, "is *Your Royal Highness.*"

"Huh!" snorted the captain. "I'll be damned if I'll call anyone *that!*"

"In these progressive days," put in Chambers helpfully, "I believe that *Sir* is quite sufficient. But there's no need to worry if you forget: it's been a long time since anyone went to the Tower. Besides, this Henry isn't as tough a proposition as the one who had all the wives."

"From all accounts," added Mitchell, "he's a very pleasant young man. Quite intelligent, too. He's often been known to ask people technical questions that they couldn't answer."

Captain Saunders ignored the implications of this remark, beyond resolving that if Prince Henry wanted to know how a Field Compensation Drive generator worked,

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then Mitchell could do the explaining. He got gingerly to his feet — they'd been operating on half a gravity during flight, and now they were on Earth he felt like a ton of bricks — and started to make his way along the corridors that led to the lower airlock. With an oily purring, the great curving door sidestepped out of his way. Adjusting his smile, he walked out to meet the television cameras and the heir to the British throne.

The man who would, presumably, one day be Henry IX of England was still in his early twenties. He was slightly below average height, and had fine-drawn, regular features that really lived up to all the genealogical clichés. Captain Saunders, who came from Dallas and had no intention of being impressed by any Prince, found himself unexpectedly moved by the wide, sad eyes. They were eyes that had seen too many receptions and parades, that had had to watch countless totally uninteresting things, that had never been allowed to stray far from the carefully planned official routes. Looking at that proud but weary face, Captain Saunders glimpsed for the first time the ultimate loneliness of royalty. All his dislike of that institution became suddenly trivial against its real defect: what was wrong with the Crown was the unfairness of inflicting such a burden on any human being. . . .

The passageways of the *Centaurus* were too narrow to allow for general sightseeing, and it was soon clear that it suited Prince Henry very well to leave his entourage behind. Once they had begun moving through the ship, Saunders lost all his stiffness and reserve, and within a few minutes was treating the Prince exactly like any other visitor. He did not realize that one of the earliest lessons royalty has to learn is that of putting people at their ease.

"You know, Captain," said the Prince wistfully, "this is a big day for us. I've always hoped that one day it would be possible for spaceships to operate from England. But it still seems strange to have a port of our own here, after all these years. Tell me — did you ever have much to do with rockets?"

"Well, I had some training on them, but they were already on the way out before I graduated. I was lucky: some older men had to go back to school and start all over again — or else abandon space completely if they couldn't convert to the new ships."

"It made as much difference as that?"

"Oh yes — when the rocket went, it was as big as the change from sail to steam. That's an analogy you'll often hear, by the way. There was a glamor about the old rockets, just as there was about the old windjammers. These modern ships haven't got it. — When the *Centaurus* takes off, she goes up as quietly as a balloon — and as slowly, if she wants to.

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But a rocket blast-off shook the ground for miles, and you'd be deaf for days if you were too near the launching apron. Still, you'll know all that from the old news-recordings."

The Prince smiled.

"Yes," he said. "I've often run through them at the Palace. I think I've watched every incident in all the pioneering expeditions. I was sorry to see the end of rockets, too. But we could never have had a spaceport here on Salisbury Plain — the vibration would have shaken down Stonehenge!"

"Stonehenge?" queried Saunders as he held open a hatch and let the Prince through into Hold Number 3.

"Ancient monument — one of the most famous stone circles in the world. It's really impressive, and about three thousand years old. See it if you can — it's only ten miles from here."

Captain Saunders had some difficulty in suppressing a smile. What an odd country this was: where else, he wondered, would you find contrasts like this? It made him feel very young and raw when he remembered that back home, the Alamo was ancient history, and there was hardly anything in the whole of Texas as much as 500 years old. For the first time he began to realize what tradition meant: it gave Prince Henry something that he could never possess. Poise — self-confidence, yes, that was it. And a pride that was somehow free from arrogance, because it took itself so much for granted that it never had to be asserted.

It was surprising how many questions Prince Henry managed to ask in the 30 minutes that had been allotted for his tour of the freighter. They were not the routine questions that people asked out of politeness, quite uninterested in the answers. H.R.H. Prince Henry knew a lot about spaceships, and Captain Saunders felt completely exhausted when he handed his distinguished guest back to the reception committee, which had been waiting outside the *Centaurus* with well-simulated patience.

"Thank you very much, Captain," said the Prince as they shook hands in the airlock. "I've not enjoyed myself so much for ages. I hope you have a pleasant stay in England, and a successful voyage." Then his retinue whisked him away and the port officials, frustrated until now, came aboard to check the ship's papers.

"Well," said Mitchell when it was all over, "what did you think of our Prince of Wales?"

"He surprised me," answered Saunders frankly. "I'd never have guessed he was a Prince. I always thought they were kind of dumb. But hell, he *knew* the principles of the Field Drive! Has he ever been up in space?"

"Once, I think. Just a hop above the atmosphere in a Space Force ship. It didn't even reach orbit

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before it came back again — but the Prime Minister nearly had a fit. There were questions in the House and editorials in the *Times*. Everyone decided that the heir to the Throne was too valuable to risk in these newfangled inventions. So, though he has the rank of Commodore in the Royal Space Force, he's never even been to the Moon."

"The poor guy," said Captain Saunders.

He had three days to burn, since it was not the Captain's job to supervise the loading of the ship or the preflight maintenance. Saunders knew skippers who hung around breathing heavily on the necks of the servicing engineers, but he wasn't that type. Besides, he wanted to see London. He had been to Mars and Venus and the Moon, but this was his first visit to England. Mitchell and Chambers filled him with useful information and put him on the monorail to London before dashing off to see their own families. They would be returning to the spaceport a day before he did, to check that everything was in order. It was a great relief having officers one could rely on so implicitly: they were unimaginative and cautious, but thoroughgoing almost to a fault. If *they* said that everything was shipshape, Saunders knew he could take off without qualms.

The sleek streamlined cylinder whistled across the carefully tailored landscape. It was so close to the ground and traveling so swiftly that one could only gather fleeting impressions of the towns and fields that flashed by. Everything, thought Saunders, was so incredibly compact, and on such a Lilliputian scale. There were no open spaces, no fields more than a mile long in any direction. It was enough to give a Texan claustrophobia — particularly a Texan who also happened to be a space-pilot.

The sharply defined edge of London appeared like the bulwarks of some walled city on the horizon. With few exceptions, the buildings were quite low — perhaps fifteen or twenty stories in height. The monorail shot through a narrow canyon, over a very attractive park, across a river that was presumably the Thames, and then came to rest with a steady, powerful surge of deceleration. A loudspeaker announced, in a modest voice that seemed afraid of being overheard: "This is Paddington. Passengers for the North please remain seated." Saunders pulled his baggage down from the rack and headed out into the station.

As he made for the entrance to the Underground, he passed a bookstall and glanced at the magazines on display. About half of them, it seemed, carried photographs of Prince Henry or other members of the Royal Family. This, thought Saunders, was altogether too much of a good thing. He also noticed that all the evening papers showed the Prince entering or leaving the *Centaurus*, and bought copies to

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read in the subway — he begged its pardon, the "tube."

The editorial comments had a monotonous similarity. At last, they rejoiced, England need no longer take a back seat among the space-going nations. Now it was possible to operate a space fleet without requiring a million square miles of desert: the silent, gravity-defying ships of today could land, if need be, in Hyde Park, without even disturbing the ducks on the Serpentine. Saunders found it odd that this sort of patriotism had managed to survive into the age of space, but he guessed that the British had felt it pretty badly when they'd had to borrow launching sites from the Australians, the Americans and the Russians.

The London Underground was still, after a century and a half, the best transport system in the world, and it deposited Saunders safely at his destination less than ten minutes after he had left Paddington. In ten minutes the *Centaurus* could have covered 50,000 miles; but space, after all, was not quite so crowded as this. Nor were the orbits of spacecraft so tortuous as the streets Saunders had to negotiate to reach his hotel. All attempts to straighten out London had failed dismally, and it was fifteen minutes before he completed the last hundred yards of his journey.

He stripped off his jacket and collapsed thankfully on his bed. Three quiet, carefree days all to himself: it seemed too good to be true.

It was. He had barely taken a deep breath when the phone rang.

"Captain Saunders? I'm so glad we found you. This is the B.B.C. We have a program called *In Town Tonight* and we were wondering . . ."

The thud of the airlock door was the sweetest sound Saunders had heard for days. Now he was safe: nobody could get at him here in his armored fortress, which would soon be far out in the freedom of space. It was not that he had been treated badly: on the contrary, he had been treated altogether too well. He had made four (or was it five?) appearances on various TV programs; he had been to more parties than he could remember; he had acquired several hundred new friends and (the way his head felt now) forgotten all his old ones.

"Who started the rumor," he said to Mitchell as they met at the port, "that the British were reserved and standoffish? Heaven help me if I ever meet a *demonstrative* Englishman."

"I take it," replied Mitchell, "that you had a good time."

"Ask me tomorrow," Saunders replied. "I'll be at home then."

"I saw you on that quiz program last night," remarked Chambers. "You looked pretty ghastly."

"Thank you: that's just the sort of sympathetic encouragement I need at the moment. I'd like to see you think of a synonym for *jejune*

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after you'd been up until three in the morning."

"Vapid," replied Chambers promptly.

"Insipid," said Mitchell, not to be outdone.

"You win. Let's have those overhaul schedules and see what the engineers have been up to."

Once seated at the control desk, Captain Saunders quickly became his usual efficient self. He was home again, and his training took over. He knew exactly what to do, and would do it with automatic precision. To right and left of him, Mitchell and Chambers were checking their instruments and calling the control tower.

It took them an hour to carry out the elaborate preflight routine. When the last signature had been attached to the last sheet of instructions, and the last red light on the monitor panel had turned to green, Saunders flopped back in his seat and lit a cigaret. They had ten minutes to spare before takeoff.

"One day," he said, "I'm going to come to England incognito to find what makes the place tick. I don't understand how you can crowd so many people onto one little island without its sinking."

"Huh," snorted Chambers. "You should see Holland. That makes England look as wide open as Texas."

"And then there's this Royal Family business. Do you know, wherever I went everyone kept asking me how I got on with Prince Henry, what we'd talked about, didn't I think he was a fine guy, and so on. Frankly, I got fed up with it. I can't imagine how you've managed to stand it for a thousand years."

"Don't think that the Royal Family's been popular all the time," replied Mitchell. "Remember what happened to Charles the First? And some of the things we said about the early Georges were quite as rude as the remarks your people made later."

"We just happen to like tradition," said Chambers. "We're not afraid to change when the time comes, but as far as the Royal Family is concerned . . . well, it's unique and we're rather fond of it. Just the way you feel about the Statue of Liberty."

"Not a fair example. I don't think it's right to put human beings up on a pedestal and treat them as if they're — well, minor deities. Look at Prince Henry, for instance. Do you think he'll ever have a chance of doing the things he really wants to do? I saw him three times on TV when I was in London. The first time he was opening a new school somewhere; then he was giving a speech to the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers at the Guildhall (I swear I'm not making *that* up) and finally he was receiving an address of welcome from the Mayor of Podunk, or whatever your equivalent is." ("Wigan," interjected Mitchell.) "I think I'd rather be in jail than live that sort of life.

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Why can't you leave the poor guy alone?"

For once, neither Mitchell nor Chambers rose to the challenge. Indeed, they maintained a somewhat frigid silence. That's torn it, thought Saunders. I should have kept my big mouth shut; now I've hurt their feelings. I should have remembered that advice I read somewhere: "The British have two religions: cricket and the Royal Family. Never attempt to criticize either."

The awkward pause was broken by the radio from the spaceport controller.

"Control to *Centaurus*. Your flight lane clear. OK to lift."

"Takeoff program starting . . . *now!*" replied Saunders, throwing the master switch. Then he leaned back, his eyes taking in the entire control panel, his hands clear of the board but ready for instant action.

He was tense but completely confident. Better brains than his — brains of metal and crystal and flashing electron streams — were in charge of the *Centaurus* now. If necessary, he could take command, but he had never yet lifted a ship manually and never expected to do so. If the automatics failed, he would cancel the takeoff and sit here on Earth until the fault had been cleared.

The main field went on, and weight ebbed from the *Centaurus*. There were protesting groans from the ship's hull and structure as the strains redistributed themselves. The curved arms of the landing cradle were carrying no load now; the slightest breath of wind would carry the freighter away into the sky.

Control called from the tower: "Your weight now zero: check calibration."

Saunders looked at his meters. The upthrust of the field should now exactly equal the weight of the ship, and the meter readings should agree with the totals on the loading schedules. In at least one instance this check had revealed the presence of a stowaway on board a spaceship — the gauges were as sensitive as that.

"One million, five hundred and sixty thousand, four hundred and twenty kilograms," Saunders read off from the thrust indicators. "Pretty good — it checks to within fifteen kilos. The first time I've been underweight, though. You could have taken on some more candy for that plump girl-friend of yours in Port Lowell, Mitch."

The assistant pilot gave a rather sickly grin. He had never quite lived down a blind date on Mars which had given him a completely unwarranted reputation for preferring statuesque blondes.

There was no sense of motion, but the *Centaurus* was now climbing up into the summer sky as her weight was not only neutralized but reversed. To the watchers below, she would be a swiftly mounting star, a silver globule falling through and beyond the clouds. Around her, the

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blue of the atmosphere was deepening into the eternal darkness of space. Like a bead moving along an invisible wire, the freighter was following the pattern of radio waves that would lead her from world to world.

This, thought Captain Saunders, was his twenty-sixth takeoff from Earth. But the wonder would never die, nor would he ever outgrow the feeling of power it gave him to sit here at the control panel, the master of forces beyond even the dreams of Mankind's ancient gods. No two departures were ever the same: some were into the dawn, some towards the sunset, some above a cloud-veiled Earth, some through clear and sparkling skies. Space itself might be unchanging, but on Earth the same pattern never recurred, and no man ever looked twice at the same landscape or the same sky. Down there the Atlantic waves were marching eternally towards Europe, and high above them — but so far below the *Centaurus!* — the glittering bands of cloud were advancing before the same winds. England began to merge into the continent, and the European coastline became foreshortened and misty as it sank hull-down beyond the curve of the world. At the frontier of the west, a fugitive stain on the horizon, was the first hint of America. With a single glance, Captain Saunders could span all the leagues across which Columbus had labored half a thousand years ago.

With the silence of limitless power, the ship shook itself free from the last bonds of Earth. To an outside observer, the only sign of the energies it was expending would have been the dull red glow from the radiation fins around the vessel's equator, as the heat loss from the mass-converters was dissipated into space.

"14:03:45," wrote Captain Saunders neatly in the log. "Escape velocity attained. Course deviation negligible."

There was little point in making the entry. The modest 25,000 miles an hour which had been the almost unattainable goal of the first astronauts had no practical significance now, since the *Centaurus* was still accelerating and would continue to gain speed for hours. But it had a profound psychological meaning. Until this moment, if power had failed, they would have fallen back to Earth. But now gravity could never recapture them: they had achieved the freedom of space, and could take their pick of the planets. In practice, of course, there would be several kinds of hell to pay if they did not pick on Mars and deliver their cargo according to plan. But Captain Saunders, like all spacemen, was fundamentally a romantic. Even on a milk-run like this he would sometimes dream of the ringed glory of Saturn, or the sombre Neptunian wastes, lit by the distant fires of the shrunken sun.

One hour after takeoff, according to the hallowed ritual, Chambers

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left the course computer to its own devices and produced the three glasses that lived beneath the chart table. As he drank the traditional toast to Newton, Oberth and Einstein, Saunders wondered how this little ceremony had originated. Space crews had certainly been doing it for at least 60 years: perhaps it could be traced back to the legendary rocket engineer who made the remark: "I've burnt more alcohol in sixty seconds than you've ever sold across this lousy bar."

Two hours later, the last course-correction that the tracking stations on Earth could give them had been fed into the computer. From now on, until Mars came sweeping up ahead, they were on their own. It was a lonely thought, yet a curiously exhilarating one. Saunders savored it in his mind. There were just the three of them here — and no one else within a million miles.

In the circumstances, the detonation of an atomic bomb could hardly have been more shattering than the modest knock on the cabin door.

Captain Saunders had never been so startled in his life. With a yelp that had already left him before he had a chance to suppress it, he shot out of his seat and rose a full yard before the ship's residual gravity field dragged him back. Chambers and Mitchell, on the other hand, behaved with traditional British phlegm. They swiveled in their bucket seats, stared at the door, and then waited for their captain to take action.

It took Saunders several seconds to recover. Had he been confronted with what might be called a normal emergency, he would already have been halfway into a spacesuit. But a diffident knock on the door of the control cabin, when everyone in the ship was sitting inside, was not a fair test.

A stowaway was simply impossible. The danger had been so obvious, right from the beginning of commercial spaceflight, that the most stringent precautions had been taken against it. One of his officers, Saunders knew, would always have been on duty during loading; no one could possibly have crept in unobserved. Then there had been the detailed preflight inspection, carried out by both Mitchell and Chambers. Finally, there was the weight check at the moment before takeoff; *that* was conclusive. No, a stowaway was totally . . .

The knock on the door sounded again. Captain Saunders clenched his fists and squared his jaw. In a few minutes, he thought, some romantic idiot was going to be very, very sorry.

"Open the door, Mr. Mitchell," Saunders growled. In a single long stride, the assistant pilot crossed the cabin and jerked open the hatch.

For an age, it seemed, no one spoke. Then the stowaway, wavering slightly in the low gravity, came into the cabin. He was completely

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self-possessed, and looked very pleased with himself.

"Good afternoon, Captain Saunders," he said, "I must apologise for this intrusion."

Saunders swallowed hard. Then, as the pieces of the jigsaw fell into place, he looked first at Mitchell, then at Chambers. Both of his officers stared guilelessly back at him with expressions of ineffable innocence. "So *that's* it," he said bitterly. There was no need for any explanations: everything was perfectly clear. It was easy to picture the complicated negotiations, the midnight meetings, the falsification of records, the off-loading of non-essential cargoes that his trusted colleagues had been conducting behind his back. He was sure it was a most interesting story, but he didn't want to hear about it now. He was too busy wondering what the Manual of Space Law would have to say about a situation like this, though he was already gloomily certain that it would be of no use to him at all.

It was too late to turn back, of course: the conspirators wouldn't have made an elementary miscalculation like that. He would just have to make the best of what looked like being the trickiest voyage in his career.

He was still trying to think of something to say when the PRIORITY signal started flashing on the radio board. The stowaway looked at his watch.

"I was expecting that," he said. "It's probably the Prime Minister. I think I'd better speak to the poor man."

Saunders thought so too.

"Very well, Your Royal Highness," he said sulkily.

It was the Prime Minister all right, and he sounded very upset. Several times he used the phrase "your duty to your people" and once there was a distinct catch in his

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throat as he said something about "devotion of your subjects to the Crown."

While this emotional harangue was in progress, Mitchell leaned over to Saunders and whispered in his ear:

"The old boy's on a sticky wicket, and he knows it. The people will be behind the Prince when they hear what's happened. Everybody knows he's been trying to get into space for years."

"Shush!" said Chambers. The Prince was speaking, his words winging back across the abyss that now sundered him from the island he would one day rule.

"I am sorry, Mr. Prime Minister," he said, "if I've caused you any alarm. I will return as soon as it is convenient. Someone has to do everything for the first time, and I felt the moment had come for a member of my family to leave Earth. My great-grandfathers were sailors before they became Kings of a maritime nation. This will be a valuable part of my education, and will make me more fitted to carry out my duty. Goodby."

He dropped the microphone and walked over to the observation window — the only spaceward-looking port on the entire ship. Saunders watched him standing there, proud and lonely — but contented now.

No one spoke for a long time. Then Prince Henry tore his gaze away from the blinding splendor beyond the port, looked at Captain Saunders, and smiled.

"Where's the galley, Captain?" he asked. "I may be out of practice, but when I used to go scouting I was the best cook in my patrol."

Saunders slowly relaxed, then smiled back. The tension seemed to lift from the control room. Mars was still a long way off, but he knew now that this wasn't going to be such a bad trip after all.

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There's something peculiarly haunting about seals, "not able to live either in the sea or on the land"; and as poetically evocative a story as this magazine has reprinted was Eric Linklater's tale of the love of a sealman, Sealskin Trousers *(F&SF, April, 1952). Now we have a different treatment of the same sad and disturbing theme by none less than the Poet Laureate of England, who proves in this 40-year-old and almost forgotten story that folk-fantasy can be pure beauty.*

The Sealman

by JOHN MASEFIELD

"THE SEALS IS PRETTY WHEN THEY do be playing," said the old woman. "Ah, I seen them frisking their tails till you'd think it was rocks with the seas beating on them, the time the storm's on. I seen the merrows of the sea sitting yonder on the dark stone, and they had crowns on them, and they were laughing. The merrows is not good; it's not good to see too many of them. They are beautiful like young men in their shirts playing hurley. They're as beautiful as anything you would be seeing in Amerikey or Australeyey, or any place. The seals is beautiful too, going through the water in the young of the day; but they're not so beautiful as them. The seals is no good either. It's a great curse keeps them the way they are, not able to live either in the sea or on the land." She shook her head sadly.

"One time there was a man of the O'Donnells came here, and he was a bad man. A saint in Heaven would have been bothered to find good in him. He died of the fever that came before the Famine. I was a girl then; and if you'd seen the people in them times; there wasn't enough to bury them. The pigs used to eat them in the loanings. And their mouths would be all green where they'd eaten grass from want of food. If you'd seen the houses there was then, indeed, you'd think the place bewitched. But the cabins is all fell in, like yonder, and there's no dancing or fiddling, or anything at all, and all of my friends is gone to Amerikey or Australeyey; I've no one at all to bury me, unless it's that humpy one who comes here, and she's as proud as a Jew. She's no cause to be proud, with a hump

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on her; her father was just a poor man, the same as any.

"This O'Donnell I was telling you. My father was at his wake. And they'd the candles lit, and they were drinking putcheen. My father was nearest the door, and a fear took him, and he got up, with his glass in his hand, and he cried out: 'There's something here is not good.' And another of them said: 'There's something wants to get out.' And another said: 'It's himself wants to go out into the dark night.' And another said: 'For the love of God, open the door.' So my father flung the door open; and, outside, the moon shone down to the sea. And the corpse of the O'Donnell was all blue, and it got up with the sheet knotted on it, and walked out without leaving a track. So they followed it, saying their prayers to Almighty God, and it walked on down to the sea. And when it came to the edge of the sea, the sea was like a flame before it. And it bowed there, three times; and each time it rose up it screamed. And all the seals, and all the merrows, and all them that's under the tides, they came up to welcome it. They called out to the corpse and laughed; and the corpse laughed back, and fell on to the sand. My father and the other men saw the wraith pass from it, into the water, as it fell.

"It was like a little black boy, laughing; with great long arms on him. It was all bald and black; and its hands moved like he was tickling.

"And after that the priest had him buried, like they buried the Old Ones; but the wraith passed into a bull seal. You would be feared to see the like of the bull seal. There was a man of the O'Kanes fired a blessed shilling at him, and the seal roared up at him and tore his arm across. There was marks like black stars on him after till he died. And the bull seal walked like a man at the change of the moon, like a big, tall, handsome man stepping the roads. You'd be feared, sir, if you saw the like. He set his eyes on young Norah O'Hara. Lovely she was. She'd little ways, sir, would draw the heart out of an old bachelor. Wasn't it a great curse he should take her when there was old hags the like of Mary that has no more beauty than a withered broom that you wouldn't be bothered to mend, or a done-out old gather-up of a duck that a hungry dog would blush to be biting? Still, he took Norah.

"She had a little son, and the little son was a sealman; the priest wouldn't sign him with the cross. When Norah died he used always to be going to the sea; he would always be swimming. He'd little soft brown hair, like a seal's, the prettiest you would be seeing. He used to talk to the seals. My father was coming home one night from Carnmore, and he saw the little sealman in the sea; and the seals were playing with him, singing songs. But my father was feared to hear; he ran away.

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They stoned the sealman, whiles, after that; but whiles they didn't stone it. They had a kindness for it, although it had no holy water on it. It was a very young thing to be walking the world, and it was a beautiful wee thing, with its eyes so pretty; so it grew up to be a man.

"Them that live in the water, they have ways of calling people. Them who passed this sealman, they felt the call in their hearts. Indeed, if you passed the sealman, stepping the roads, you would get a queer twist from the way he looked at you.

"And he set his love on a young girl of the O'Keefe's, a little young girl with no more in her than the flower on its stalk. You would see them in the loanings coming home, or in the bright of the day going. There was a strong love was on them two young things; it was like the love of the Old Ones that took nine deaths to kill. They would be telling Kate it was not right she should set her love on one who wasn't like ourselves; but there's few indeed as the young'll listen. They are all for pleasure, all for pleasure, before they are withered hags. And at last they shut her up at home, to keep her from seeing him. And he came by her cabin to the west of the road, calling. There was a strong love came up to her at that, and she put down her sewing on the table, and 'Mother,' she says, 'there's no lock, and no key, and no bolt, and no door. There's no iron, nor no stone, nor anything at all will keep me this night from the man I love.' And she went out into the moonlight to him, there by the bush where the flowers is pretty, beyond the river. And he says to her: 'You are all of the beauty of the world, will you come where I go, over the waves of the sea?' And she says to him: 'My treasure and strength,' she says, 'I would follow you on the frozen hills, my feet bleeding.'

"Then they went down into the sea together, and the moon made a track upon the sea, and they walked down it; it was like a flame before them. There was no fear at all on her, only a great love like the love of the Old Ones, that was stronger than the touch of the fool. She had a little white throat, and little cheeks like flowers, and she went down into the sea with her man, who wasn't a man at all. She was drowned, of course. It's like he never thought that she wouldn't bear the sea like himself.

"When it come light they saw the sealman sitting yonder on the rock, and she lying by him dead, with her face as white as a flower. He was crying and beating her hands to bring life to her. It would have drawn pity from a priest to hear him though he wasn't Christian. And at last, when he saw that she was drowned, he took her in his arms and slipped into the sea like a seal. And he swam, carrying her, with his head up, laughing and laughing and laughing, and no one ever saw him again at all."

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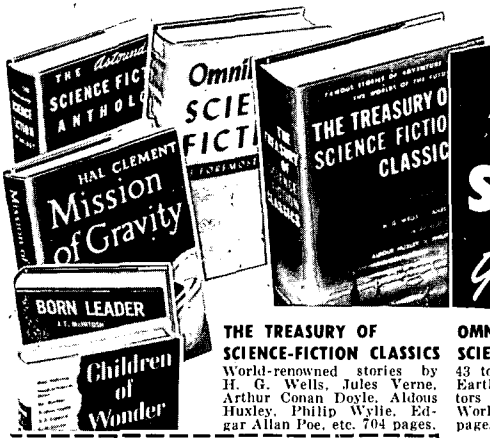

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